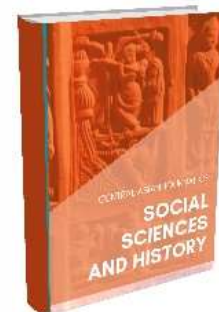




CENTRAL ASIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HISTORY

Journal homepage: <https://cajssh.centralasianstudies.org>



STRUGGLES FOR KHORASAN IN XVI – XVII CENTURIES

Azamat Ziyoy
Institute of History

Abstract:

Due to the collapse of Timurid state, there appeared new states in its central territory. Later these states confronted each other due to territorial disputes that was covered under religious views. The article highlights the confrontation between Shaibanids and their successors with main Safavid Iran and Baburid India's participation in these conflicts.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25-Sep-23

Received in revised form Sep-23

Accepted 15-Oct-23

Available online 30-Nov-2023

Key word: Shaibani Khan, Safavids, Akbar Shah, Imam Quli Khan, Khorasan, Bukhara.

Introduction

The disintegration of the Timurid state resulted in the formation of two states in its large territory. They were the State of Safavids in Western Iran (907 (1501) – 1145 (1732) and the State of Shaybanids reigning Central Asia, Northern Afghanistan and North-Eastern Iran. The sovereigns of these two countries kept struggling for Khurasan throughout the XVI century. There were reasonable arguments to do so.

As is known, important military and trade routes crossed Khorasan at that period. Besides, gold, copper, iron, silver, turquoise and other mineral resources were extracted in the area. Since the fertility of land was high in the region, various agricultural products were harvested during the whole year and they were exported to other countries. Furthermore, handcraftsmanship was also well developed there.

Main part.

According to the medieval historian Mahmud ibn Wali, Khorasan was considered one of the best countries in the administrative part of the world. There were factors that brought these two states on two opposing sides due to their aspirations for the possession of Khorasan and Turkestan, which had an

important place in military-political and economic relations. As soon as Safavid dynasty power was established, the Shiite sect of Islam was recognized as the state religion of Iran while Sunni sect was dominant in the Shaibanid state.

Muhammad Shaibani Khan (905(1500) - 916(1510), the founder of the Shaybanid state in Central Asia, adopted the title of imam al-zaman wa khalafat al-rahman (the imam of the age and the caliph of the merciful Allah on Earth). Doing so, he tried to emphasize that he had undertaken the duty of commanding the army against Ismail 1 (907(1501 - 930(1524)), the founder of the state of Shiites and Safavids. Apparently, the conflict between Sunnis and Shiites in the fight for Khurasan seems to be one of the important factors that prompted the two Muslim communities to join “Ghazawat” (“holy war against infidel”).

It should be noted that the ideological factor played a supplementary role in the relations between the two big states of that time. “Large-scale military campaigns that took place in the territory of Khurasan ... resulted in the death of many people’s lives and material losses. Besides, the rulers of both countries pretended to be the strugglers of the highest faith and masterfully veiled the goal of their foreign political activities in a religious frame [3:195].

It is obvious that military-tactical capabilities of the powers had decisive role during military conflicts rather than religious controversy. Notwithstanding that, two cases could be brought as examples to highlight undoubtedly the importance of ideological controversy in this struggle. These are: the powers seeking to justify their goals of conquest and the use of religious conflicts in the occupied lands in the process of establishing a new order.

In this regard, Shaibani Khan’s first correspondence sent to Ismail 1 after capturing Herat in 913 (1507) is noteworthy. Some excerpts are given from the letter: “May it be known to Ismail darugha who has earned the honour of our immense royal grace, ... in the palace of mercy and majesty, which holds the world, [ascending] on the throne of justice and goodness, we established our policy having it read in khutba [sermon]. The coin for brave men be decorated with our noble nickname in the place of winners and braves. (After that) a mysterious voice from the unseen conveyed to us the call regarding the Imamate (of the time) and the Caliphate (of Allah on the Earth). Now, as evidence, we inform you that in the words of Hazrat Prophet (pbuh): it was said that “al-walidu sirru abihi” (“all that the father has belongs to the son”). This means that the inheritance left by the father belongs to the son and (only his) descendants are legitimate to it... In addition, since the honour of visiting the Kaaba is one of the most important pillars of Islam and is obligatory for all Muslims, you develop all the roads leading to Kaaba and improve the facilities [on these roads]. (Our) victorious soldiers claim to gain the honour of pilgrimaging. Furthermore, you prepare gifts and guides, you decorate coins with our noble nickname at the mint, you declare our nickname in khutba [sermon] in the mosques, and you face the threshold of our supreme abode” [4:112]. Otherwise, I am, Shaibani Khan threatens to send to Iran, first the troops of Bukhara, Samarkand, Hazora, Nikudors, Gur, Garchistan, and then the troops of Kandahar, Baghlan, Hisar, Badakhshan, Turkestan, Khorezm, Kashgar, Dashti Kipchak [4:113-114].

As is seen from this correspondence, Shaibani Khan claims all the legacy of Timurid state. He

was ready to demand his rights in this regard both by relying on the Aqidah of the dominant ideology and by using military and political measures. If truth be told, Shaibani Khan was ruling a huge country which stretched from the territories of in the north Dashti Kipchak to Kandahar in the south, from Kharezm in the west to Kashgar in the east, that is, the centre of the former Timurid state. The religious factor was very imperative to him in the process of implementation and satisfaction of internal opportunities and requirements in foreign political activities.

The state of affairs of Shah Ismail I was somewhat different. The Safavid state was the only one in the region to adopt Shiism as its official ideology. Therefore, he had to consider one important factor in his foreign policy, that is, the two large neighbouring countries: the Ottoman Empire and Shaibanid state were steadfast supporters and guardians of Sunnism.

Therefore, depending on certain conditions, Ismail I sometimes applied for diplomatic efforts, and he sometimes made a direct armed attack. For example, Ismail I had to establish peaceful relations with Turkey, taking into account the threat causing by Shaibani Khan to Khurasan. Although there was an extreme conflict between Ismail I and Sultan Bayazid II (896(1481) - 918 (1512), they exchanged ambassadors and correspondences and tried not to aggravate the existing conflict, making concessions to each other to some extent [2:159-160]. However, the relations between Shaibani Khan and Ismael I were quite different.

The threat to the interests of the Safavids by Shaibani Khan intensified gradually. Therefore, after having established regulations in the country, Ismail led a military campaign to the direction of Khurasan on the first day of Rajab 916 (October 1510). When Shaibani Khan had been aware of that (he was in Herat at that time), he found it necessary to resettle in Merv with his soldiers. In terms of the number of troops, the army of Ismail I had a great advantage compared to Shaibani Khan. Ismail I had mobilised the armies of all provinces under his command in this campaign. The battle between them took place in the neighbourhood of Merv in December 1510. This clash was conducted so mercilessly that according to the words of the historian, “the tributary of Mahmud River was filled with the corpses of dead people and horses”. Anyone who tried to cross it would step over corpses and horses.

...The Safavids considered the people of Khorasan to be under their dominance and instigated to blame their northern neighbours for violating their peace. It seems that Turkish and Iranian speaking population also recognised the political rule of the Safavids and all the consequences related to it as written on their fate, and the feeling of citizenship of the Safavid state occupied their minds. Despite the threats expressed in the correspondence, Ubaydullah Khan was forced to proceed with this situation and Tahmasp I's claim in practice.

According to afore-mentioned Hasan Bek Rumlu, after capturing Herat in 943 (1536), Ubaydullah Khan “sent Tanish Bi to the city and ordered to prevent the looting of (local) Muslims by the Turks (i.e. his soldiers). When he arrived in the city, he announced through the heralds the order not to threaten the property of the residents. Due to this, the unrest (among the residents) decreased (considerably)”. Another historian Iskandar Bek Munshi, who served the Safavids, testifies that “Ubaydullah Khan dealt with the internal situation during the 14 months he stayed in Herat” [7:116]. With this, Ubaidullah Khan tried to improve relations with the local population on the one hand, and on the other hand, he tried to stabilize the population of the provinces under his control, at least to some

extent. In turn, such a policy could match the permanent interests of Ubaidullah Khan and, in general the Shaybanids in Khorasan.

The issue of struggle for Khurasan became more intense due to the appearance of Abdulla Khan II (991(1583) - 1006(1598)) on the political arena of Bukhara. An enthusiastic and skilled military commander, Abdulla Khan II captured Herat in 996 (1566). Shortly afterwards, he achieved to have control on Jom, Qawsiya, Guryon, Fushanj, Nishapur, Mashhad, Sabzavar, Isfaroin, etc. For 10 years, almost until the end of the century, the Safavids were powerless to take any action against the Shaybanids in Khorasan.

The attention must be drawn to one case here. It is the case that began to affect the Khurasan problem and gradually became permanent. The issue refers to the role of the Babur dynasty (952(1526) - 1274 (1858)) in this matter. It is known that Babur's grandson Akbar (936(1556) - 1014(1605)) strengthened the power of the Baburids both in India and in the provinces of Kabul and Kandahar. Khorasan was the reason of conflict between Bukhara and Iran while Bukhara and India have always quarreled over Badakhshan. Kandahar was claimed by Iran and India in that period. So all three states had mutual territorial disputes.

These problems were sometimes seen indirectly, sometimes directly, sometimes in bilateral and in multilateral relations. Besides, the religious factor always had influence on the matter. For example, in 992 (1584), Abdullah Khan captured Badakhshan. After that, he started to build plans about organizing a march to Herat. But before embarking on this task, he needed to know Akbar's attitude towards Bukhara after the events in Badakhshan. In order to clarify the issue, Abdullah Khan sent his ambassador to India in 993 (1585). The correspondence addressed to Akbar and sent by the ambassador states the following: "...The heretical Shiites (Iranians) are causing various obstacles in the way of pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. We sent mujahid Muhammad Nazar Bai Dadkhah, one of the nobles, in order to call the Shiites to justice, turn them away from the path of wrongdoing and lead them to the path of truth. Unfortunately, when Muhammad Nazar Bai returned to Bukhara, he stated that Shia-Iranians had refused to accept his terms put forward by him" [6:63].

The attitude towards the Khurasan problem in the foreign policy of Bukhara remained that same even after the political and dynastic changes in the country, i.e., the succession of the Shaibanids by the Ashtarkhanids (1109 (1601) – 1170 (1757)). Shah Abbas I, who skilfully enjoyed of internal conflicts in the Bukhara Khanate, managed to return Khorasan in 1002 (1599). In addition, he tried to interfere in the internal affairs of the Ashtarkhanid state. At this point, we should recollect the military assistance he provided to Wali Muhammad Khan (1013 (1605) – 1020 (1611)), one of the Ashtarkhanid rulers who had been overthrown from the throne of Bukhara [1:110-111; 3:105-107]. Of course, all this had negative impact on the status of the Bukhara Khanate. Therefore, Ashtarkhanid Imam Quli Khan (1020 (1611) – 1051 (1642)) taking into account Iran's threat to Kandahar and India's interest in Kandahar, proposed to Baburid Shah Jahangir (1014 (1606) – 1037 (1628)) to ally and launch a campaign against Khurasan. Jahangir accepted this proposal and, unlike Akbar, gave the following answer: "The leaders of the inappropriate sect, especially the rascal Shiites, who took the position of heresy and sectarianism,

abandoned the right path, and wandered on the path of deception, should be destroyed. This (event) should be started from the abode of the ruler of Iran, who is supporting the sect of heresy. It is necessary to mobilise all our efforts to repel him. In Sha Allah, we shall do so” [5:191a-191b].

However, riots started in the northern subjects of the Bukhara Khanate in the meantime, and Imam Quli Khan had to sign a peace treaty with Iran. The contract delayed the issue of marching to Khorasan.

After the struggle between Bukhara and India for Balkh and Badakhshan in 1056 (1646) – 1057 (1647), there happened some changes in the relations of the political powers in the region as a whole.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, although ideological differences played a secondary role in interstate relations, they always exist in policy. The dynasties changed, the political situation in the region changed, but the religious factor did not disappear. It all depends on who can use it, when and under what circumstances. The struggle for the purity of Islam always was an important issue.

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