

SOME SOURCES ON THE PERIOD OF MUHAMMAD RAHIM KHAN I IN THE KHIVA KHANATE**Soatkulov Islom Ravshanovich**

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Annotation: This article reveals the period of Muhammad Rahim Khan I in the Khiva Khanate, the reforms carried out during this time, the achievements in foreign relations, as well as the changes implemented in the socio-economic and military spheres.

Keywords: armor, coin minter, khivaq, soldier, chamberlain, commander, tax kesma, inoq, biy, centurion, Merv..

Analysis of Literature

In this article, the works “Firdavs ul-iqbol” by Munis and “Shajarayi Khorezmshohiy” by Muhammad Yusuf Bayoniy were analyzed.

Relevance of the Topic

The reign of Muhammad Rahim Khan I (1806–1825) occupies a special place in history. During this period, efforts were made to ensure political stability within the khanate, strengthen centralized governance, regulate foreign relations, and implement socio-economic reforms.

Introduction

In the history of the Uzbek khanates, the reign of Muhammad Rahim Khan I (1806–1825) in the early 19th century is distinguished by political stability, internal administrative reforms, and the development of external relations. Historical sources describing the events of this era, in particular “Firdavs ul-iqbol” and “Shajarayi Khorezmshohiy”, are significant for studying the political thought, social structure, and cultural environment of that time. Analyzing these sources through modern historiographical approaches is of great scientific importance for a deeper understanding of Muhammad Rahim Khan I's era and for revealing the historical roots of our national statehood.

Discussion and Results

After the death of Eltuzar Khan in 1806, internal discord and the threat of external enemies increased within the khanate. Following Eltuzar Khan's death, Muhammad Rahim ascended the throne under the name Muhammad Rahim Khan I. At that time, the khanate was surrounded by numerous problems, including struggles for the throne, the disobedience of local tribes to the khan's authority, and frequent invasions by external enemies into the khanate's territory.

According to “Firdavs ul-iqbol”, when Muhammad Rahim Khan I took power, the socio-political and cultural-economic life of the country was extremely complicated [1:275]. In the early years of his rule, the socio-political situation in the country grew increasingly tense. As a result, the ruler was compelled to take decisive measures to ensure territorial integrity and political stability. During this time, factionalism and separatism were particularly strong in the northern regions of the khanate. Apart from To'ramurod Sufi, leaders such as O'rinboybiy, Eshjonbiy, Hasanbiy, Esangaldibi, To'qtapo'lodbiy, and Mamanbiy—who ruled the Yangidaryo Karakalpak—

refused to submit to the ruler of Khorezm and strengthened their relations with the Emir of Bukhara. They constantly engaged in plundering Khorezm and Kazakh caravans.

From the early years of his rule, Muhammad Rahim Khan I began to combat these issues, and thanks to his policies, the khanate soon experienced both economic and political revival.

Muhammad Rahim Khan I first directed his attention toward reforming the administrative system. On one hand, he sought to reduce the influence of tribal and clan structures; on the other, he aimed to end the internal conflicts among them. His goal was to eliminate internal discord and border raids, beginning with serious reforms in state administration and the military sector. Although the administrative system inherited from the Shaybanids was still in place, bribery, excessive numbers of officials, and disregard for royal decrees had become widespread.

To restore proper order, Muhammad Rahim Khan decided to carry out reforms in all spheres. One of his first actions was to reduce the number of officials from 360 to 100 [2]. At that time, the number of bureaucrats had increased excessively, and they were unpaid, leading them to exploit the working population through various taxes, enriching themselves while the people grew poorer and the state saw no benefit.

His second reform concerned the royal harem. During the reigns of previous khans, the harem included about 40 concubines and their attendants, all maintained at state expense. Muhammad Rahim Khan reduced their number to seven [3]. During the reform process, he significantly limited the authority of the inoq administration system, including positions such as inoq, biy, sulton, yuzboshi, and even the qozi kalon. Previously, the rights of the settled (sart) population had been entirely restricted, but now many of the khan's close officials were selected from among them.

During Muhammad Rahim Khan's rule, officials began to be appointed not only from one clan but from various others, contributing to greater equality within the khanate. For instance, the chief vizier, Yusuf Mehtar, was from the sart class and was a highly capable and organized person who gained the khan's trust. Being a skilled architect, he designed numerous buildings. Overall, Muhammad Rahim Khan pursued a consistent policy to increase the accountability of his officials.

By the time of his reign, corruption, opium smoking, alcohol consumption, and immoral behavior such as prostitution had become widespread among officials, landowners, and even some religious figures. The khan was thus compelled to take decisive measures against such practices, as they had weakened the common people. Crimes such as rape of young girls and pederasty had become rampant. According to his decree, drinking alcohol and smoking opium were strictly prohibited, and violators were punished by having their mouths cut open from ear to ear [4].

Another significant reform was in the monetary system. By that time, the quality of coins in the khanate had severely declined. To prevent this, Muhammad Rahim Khan established a large mint in Khiva, located in the Ko'hna Ark fortress, where gold and silver coins were minted. The gold coins were of the highest quality, with the inscription "Abulg'oziy Muhammad Rahim Bahodirkhan" on the obverse and "Zarb dorus-saltana Khivaq" (minted in the capital city Khiva) along with the minting year on the reverse [5]. These coins were notable for their weight and superior quality.

In the Khiva Khanate, the large number of tribes and their constant refusal to submit to the central authority led to the expansion of internal conflicts. To prevent this, military reforms were periodically implemented within the khanate, although a permanent army did not exist. A strong state requires a strong army, and the khan, recognizing this, aimed to establish a regular military force. Up to that time, the khanate had relied on volunteer detachments, which were gathered before any military campaign. These troops were mostly mercenaries, requiring large financial expenses. The main part of these forces consisted of Turkmen and Karakalpak military units, which formed the backbone of Khiva's military strength.

Whereas previously the army was composed of forces from various vassal tribes, by the 19th century the armed forces of the khanate had become an integral part of the centralized state apparatus. During this period, a regular army of about two thousand soldiers was established [6]. Another significant problem facing the khanate was the issue of irrigation. Continuous wars, looting, and poor maintenance of irrigation systems left agriculture in a difficult state, which in turn led to population decline and migration. One of Muhammad Rahimkhan I's reforms in this field was a creative approach to water management. The khan issued decrees to dig new canals, repair irrigation systems, and regulate water use. In Khorezm's irrigation economy, small territorial water-user communities known as "jabdi" were established. However, their size had not been previously standardized. Only during the reign of Muhammad Rahimkhan I (1806–1825) was the standard size of a jabdi defined as ten tanobs [7].

The reform and development of the irrigation system, along with the construction of new canals, expanded irrigated land and contributed to the settlement of nomadic populations. Innovations were also introduced into the tax system, replacing natural payments with monetary taxes through the introduction of the "Kesma tax."

As one traveler described:

"The cultivated lands and plants in Khiva are unlike anything I have seen, even in Germany. Every courtyard is surrounded by canals, and bridges are built everywhere. Walking through the meadows among fruit trees, I was delighted by the songs of countless birds. The clay houses standing in these beautiful places create a picturesque view." [8]

As a result of these reforms, the irrigation system was restored, and the population increased. Russian missionary N. N. Muravyov evaluated the policies of the Khiva ruler as follows:

"In general, it must be noted that the ruler of Khiva does not miss a single opportunity to strengthen his state and increase the population. Indeed, it can be confidently said that, after some time, Khiva will take its place among the most powerful Eastern states." [9]

During the reign of Muhammad Rahimkhan I, Khiva's foreign relations also strengthened. Several factors contributed to this, including the elimination of internal divisions, the establishment of a strong army, the end of border raids, and territorial expansion. During this period, the khanate maintained active diplomatic and trade relations with Bukhara, Kokand, the Kazakh juz, Iran, the Russian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire.

When Muhammad Rahimkhan I ascended the throne, the Khiva Khanate was in economic decline. Exportable goods were few, while domestic demand was high. Iron products imported from Russia, in particular, were scarce in the markets. Upon taking power, Muhammad Rahimkhan focused on pulling the country out of economic crisis and improving the material well-being of the people, successfully revitalizing trade in urban centers. Many new shops were built, and along with trade, diplomatic relations also flourished.

In order to surpass the Bukhara and Kokand khanates economically and militarily, Muhammad Rahimkhan I sought to improve relations with the Russian Empire. For Russia, economic and political ties with the Central Asian khanates, especially Khiva, were of great strategic importance. Khiva's proximity to major trade routes and its growing influence among local powers made it a crucial partner for establishing trade relations between Russia and Central Asia. Consequently, "on July 20, 1816, Tsarist Russia decided to organize a special expedition to Khiva and Turkmenistan. Major Ponomaryov was appointed to head the water route section, and Captain Muravyov was placed in charge of the land route. Accordingly, N. N. Muravyov arrived in Khiva as an envoy. He was warmly received by Muhammad Rahimkhan I, who accepted all of his proposals and agreed to send trusted representatives with him" [10].

After this meeting, relations between the two states became more active, with trade and diplomatic exchanges intensifying. Muhammad Rahimkhan I aimed to strengthen the state politically while avoiding excessive economic and political dependence on Russia. Despite the constant threat of invasions from the Bukhara Emirate and the Kokand Khanate, he also sought to maintain trade and diplomatic ties with them.

In foreign policy, Muhammad Rahimkhan I adopted a multifaceted approach: resolving issues with some states through diplomacy while subduing others through military means. His military campaigns in the Dashti Qipchoq and Khorasan regions, as well as his frequent incursions into Bukhara territories, attest to this strategy. Historians describe that during his reign, Khiva, Bukhara, Iran, and the Kazakh khans were frequently engaged in conflicts. However, under Muhammad Rahimkhan I, Khiva became a state with enough political and social influence to actively participate in regional affairs.

At the beginning of the 19th century, three major states had emerged in Central Asia — the Bukhara Emirate, the Khiva Khanate, and the Kokand Khanate. Their relations were closely intertwined with political rivalry, economic interests, and the broader geopolitical situation, making diplomatic engagement between them a necessity.

After a series of wars, relations between Khiva and Bukhara deteriorated, and border regions became plagued by mutual raids. Diplomatic relations, which had ceased after the 1806 Bukhara–Khiva war, were restored in 1811, when Emir Haydar sent envoys to Khiva under the pretext of a royal wedding celebration.

As recorded in *Firdavs ul-Iqbol*:

“At that time, for the grand wedding of his son, Emir Haydar sent his envoy O‘roqboy, the leader of the Manghit clan, and Avaz Muhammad, the yasovulbashi, to Khorezm, bearing gifts and letters of goodwill.” [11]

Muhammad Rahimkhan received them with great hospitality and sent Hasan Murod Otaliq and Qandim Sardor back to Bukhara with gifts, marking the resumption of mutual diplomatic visits. Later, during the reign of Emir Haydar, internal dynastic conflicts arose in Bukhara concerning the Merv region, and Muhammad Rahimkhan attempted to take advantage of this situation by supporting Din Nasir.

In 1813, while Muhammad Rahimkhan was hunting near Old Urgench, he received letters from Din Nasir, Mashhad Beklarbegi Qilich Temurbiy, and Turbat governor Isoxon Qaroyi. Around the same time, an envoy from Bukhara named Orifkhoja arrived expressing friendship. The khan sent Orifkhoja back accompanied by Berdi Inoq, Mashhad, and Nodir Sardor with precious gifts [12].

By 1815–1817, diplomatic exchanges intensified further. In 1816, envoys from the Dashti Qipchoq governor Norbek, Bukhara’s representative Nurmuhammadbek, and Turkmen tribes — Solur, Soriq, and Ersari — arrived. The Kazakh Sultan Sherg‘ozi sent one of his beautiful daughters as a gift to the khan. Upon hearing of their arrival, Muhammad Rahimkhan sent Khodjash Mahrambek and Otaniyoz Choqqan to receive them at Moylijangal, later joined by Sayid Yusufkhoja Naqib and Shohniyoz Otaliq.

Around the same time, the Turkmen envoy Iymar Shaykh Kadukhan brought letters from the Afghan ruler Shah Mahmud and Prince Kamran [13]. The khan then dispatched Qandim Sardor as an envoy to Bukhara. In 1823, Podshohkhoja delivered a letter from the Emir of Bukhara to Muhammad Rahimkhan, expressing hope for the establishment of friendly relations and proposing a peace treaty [14].

When considering the Khiva Khanate’s relations with the Kokand Khanate, it is clear that Muhammad Rahimkhan I focused his foreign policy on two primary directions: rivalry with Bukhara and the establishment of economic and political relations with Kokand. In particular, diplomatic missions between Khiva and Kokand became an essential component of Khiva’s foreign affairs. The dispatch of envoys was primarily motivated by trade interests, border issues, and, in certain cases, the need to form an alliance against Bukhara.

In every circumstance, Muhammad Rahimkhan I sought to utilize both neighboring khanates to his advantage. With the accession of Umar Khan to the Kokand throne, Muhammad Rahimkhan attempted to improve relations with Kokand and join forces to seize Bukhara. From the early years of his reign, he regarded Kokand as a counterbalance to Bukhara and therefore initiated diplomatic engagement with it.

During these years, the first envoys were sent from Khiva to Kokand to discuss the opening of trade routes and the establishment of political alliances [15]. The initial communications primarily concerned trade and customs duties. In 1811, Khivan envoys to Kokand raised issues such as the reduction of customs tariffs and taxes, as well as the protection of merchant caravans. Umar Khan of Kokand was also interested in gaining access to the Iranian trade route through Khiva.

Subsequently, discussions turned to border security, order in frontier regions, and the prevention of looting. In 1816–1817, disputes arose between Khiva and Kokand over the grazing lands along the Syr Darya and in the Kyzylkum desert. Muhammad Rahimkhan I sent an envoy to Kokand to discuss the safety of herders and caravans [16]. Taking advantage of this situation, Muhammad Rahimkhan focused on creating a powerful army capable of suppressing internal conflicts and, after achieving this goal, redirected his attention toward conquering the Bukhara Emirate. The reasons for this included ongoing territorial disputes and the ambition to expand his domains.

However, the Khiva Khanate did not possess sufficient military strength to achieve this. Realizing this, Muhammad Rahimkhan sought to reestablish military ties with Kokand. In 1819, he dispatched a diplomatic mission to Kokand led by Muhammad Yusuf Devonbegi. The main purpose of this embassy was to form a military alliance against Bukhara. Nevertheless, this alliance proved short-lived [17].

After the death of Umar Khan in 1822, his son Muhammad Ali Khan ascended the throne of Kokand. During this period, Muhammad Rahimkhan I sent envoys from Khiva to strengthen friendly relations with the new ruler. The envoys aimed to obtain privileges for trade caravans and to continue the policy of peace and cooperation [18]. However, these diplomatic efforts did not achieve the desired results, as internal conflicts within Kokand prevented the provision of military assistance to Khiva.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the reign of Muhammad Rahimkhan I was marked by efforts to strengthen centralized governance in the Khiva Khanate, establish stable political and diplomatic relations with neighboring states, and maintain internal order. The available historical sources clearly reflect these efforts, shedding light on the khan's personal qualities, military campaigns, judicial and legal reforms, fiscal policies, and religious–educational initiatives.

The study of Muhammad Rahimkhan's reign provides deep insights into Khiva's struggle to preserve political independence and maintain internal social stability through strategic and diplomatic actions. Therefore, researching this topic and the related historical sources is not only essential for uncovering historical truth but also significant for understanding the traditions of national statehood and political culture in Central Asia.

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