



Political Transformation, Ethnic Composition And Socio-Military Processes In The Khiva Khanate (18th–19th Centuries)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the political transformations, ethnic composition, and socio-military developments in the Khiva Khanate from the second half of the 18th century to the late 19th century. Special attention is given to the rise of the Qongirat dynasty, the weakening of central authority, and the role of tribal elites in shaping the political system. The study analyzes the increasing importance of Turkmen tribes as a military and political force, as well as their complex relationship with the khanate authorities. Furthermore, the article explores the processes of population resettlement, the expansion of slave trade, and the impact of Russian imperial expansion on the region. The research also highlights the regional differences in ethnic composition between southern agricultural areas and the Aral Sea region, as well as the historical formation of the Uzbek ethnonym.

Keywords:

Khiva Khanate, Qongirat dynasty, Central Asia, Turkmen tribes, ethnic composition, Uzbek ethnonym, slave trade, political transformation, Russian expansion, socio-military structure

Introduction: The history of the Khiva Khanate in the 18th–19th centuries is characterized by significant political changes, shifts in power structures, and transformations in ethnic composition. This period witnessed the rise of the Qongirat dynasty, the increasing role of tribal groups, particularly the Turkmen, and the gradual integration of different ethnic communities into the socio-political system. Studying these processes is essential for understanding the historical dynamics of Central Asia.

Research Methodology: The study is based on a historical-analytical approach, using comparative and descriptive methods. Primary and secondary historical sources are analyzed to examine political developments, ethnic composition, and socio-economic processes. The research also applies a systematic approach

to evaluate the interaction between different social and ethnic groups within the khanate.

Literature Review: Previous studies on the Khiva Khanate have mainly focused on political history, dynastic changes, and Russian expansion in Central Asia. Scholars have also examined the role of tribal structures, especially the Turkmen, in regional politics. However, the interconnection between political transformations, ethnic composition, and socio-military structures

Materials. From the second half of the 18th century, significant changes began to occur in the balance of political power in Central Asia. While the Mangits were gradually strengthening their authority in Transoxiana, political leadership in Khorezm began to pass into the hands of the leaders of the Qongirat tribe. In the first half of the 18th century, there was political

rivalry between the Qongirats and the Mangits, which influenced the overall political situation in the region [1.63].

In particular, the Iranian ruler Nadir Shah played an important role in Khorezm's politics, supporting the influence of the Mangits. However, after his death, a sharp shift in the balance of power occurred, resulting in the political dominance of the Qongirats [2.14]

Although the Qongirat nobility gained full control of power, they initially attempted to preserve the traditional political system. For this reason, the title of inoq emerged as a key political position. In practice, the state was governed by Qongirat officials holding this title, while individuals of Chinggisid descent were formally placed on the throne as khans to maintain political legitimacy. However, these khans held no real power, which remained in the hands of the Qongirat inoqlars.

The 1750s–1760s were a particularly turbulent period in Khorezm's history. Conflicts intensified among various socio-ethnic groups, including urban sarts, Uzbek tribes, and Turkmen tribes, especially the Yomuts. These tensions weakened state governance and led to the emergence of semi-independent groups [3.210].

In 1770, the situation worsened when Yomut Turkmen forces captured Khiva, creating a state of complete anarchy. In this crisis, Muhammad Amin Inoq acted decisively, gathered military forces, defeated the Yomuts, and expelled them from Khorezm. As a result, he became the de facto ruler and strengthened the political position of the Qongirats. His successor, Avaz Inoq (1790–1804), continued this system, maintaining the formal enthronement of Chinggisid khans while real power remained in the hands of the inoqlars [1.64–65].

By the early 19th century, relative political stability was restored. In 1804, Avaz Inoq's son Eltuzar declared himself khan, formally establishing the Qongirat dynasty in the Khiva Khanate. However, his rule was short-lived, as he died in 1806 during a conflict with Bukhara. He was succeeded by his brother Muhammad Rahim Khan I, whose reign marked a period of political consolidation.

Muhammad Rahim Khan focused on unifying the state and, in 1811, succeeded in taking control of the Aral region, restoring territorial integrity. He also suppressed rebellions by Uzbek tribal leaders and strengthened central authority. Through military campaigns, he subjugated groups of Karakalpaks, Turkmen, and Kazakhs.

In 1811, Karakalpak populations living along the eastern shores of the Aral Sea were relocated to the Amu Darya delta, reflecting military-strategic objectives such as border security and control of resources. Additionally, several Turkmen tribes—including Qaradashli, Goklen, and Yemreli—were resettled in Khorezm, later becoming a key component of the khanate's military forces.

The migration of Turkmen tribes was closely linked to Qongirat policy. Since the Qongirats were not of Chinggisid origin, they faced challenges in establishing political legitimacy and thus relied on new social support, particularly Turkmen tribes. These tribes became a crucial military force and actively participated in internal conflicts and external wars.

By the mid-19th century, Turkmen tribes constituted a significant portion of the population—approximately one quarter—and formed the core of the military. However, relations between the khanate and Turkmen tribes became strained due to taxation and increased political control, leading to uprisings.

During the first half of the 19th century, the slave trade expanded significantly. Raids into Khorasan and northern Afghanistan resulted in captives who were sold in Khiva, making it one of the largest slave markets in Central Asia.

In 1851–1854, Khivan ruler Muhammad Amin Khan launched campaigns against Turkmen tribes in the Merv region. However, his campaign against the Teke Turkmen ended in defeat, and he was killed in battle. This led to renewed instability until about 1867.

Meanwhile, the Russian Empire intensified its expansion into Central Asia. After conquering Bukhara, it turned its attention to Khiva. In 1873, under the command of Konstantin Petrovich Kaufman, Russian forces captured Khiva. The khan Muhammad Rahim Khan II

surrendered, and the khanate became a Russian protectorate.

Ethnically, Khorezm was divided into two regions: the southern “Besh qala” (Five Cities) area and the Aral Sea region. The south was dominated by sedentary sarts, while the Aral region was inhabited by nomadic Uzbeks and Karakalpaks. The term “Uzbek” emerged as an ethnonym in the 14th century and is often associated with Uzbek Khan. Its political and ethnic meaning became clearer in the early 16th century during the rule of Muhammad Shaybani Khan, when nomadic tribes migrated into Transoxiana and became known as Uzbeks.

Conclusion: In conclusion, the history of the Khiva Khanate in the 18th–19th centuries reflects a complex process of political transformation, ethnic integration, and socio-economic change. The rise of the Qongirat dynasty, the crucial role of Turkmen tribes, and the impact of Russian expansion significantly shaped the region’s historical development.

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