



STAGES IN THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLITICAL GOVERNANCE IN THE KHIVA KHANATE

Shonazar Sobirovich Matyakubov

Senior Research Fellow

Khorezm Academy of Ma'mun

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in History

shonazarmatyogubov@gmail.com

Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 8 th December 2025 Accepted: 6 th February, 2026	<i>In this article, the author presents information about the formation and stages of development of administrative and political governance in the Khiva Khanate</i>
Keywords: <i>Khiva, Kungrat dynasty, Khon, Inak, Supreme Council, Supreme Court, large landowners (bekis), centralised state administration, administrative and political power, region, territorial rule).</i>	

Khiva's transformation into the capital and centre of the Khorezm Khanate took place against a backdrop of environmental changes, political strife, bloody wars, territorial conquests, and power struggles aimed at seizing the throne.

By the late 16th to early 17th centuries, the rule of the Uzbek khans had become firmly established in Khorezm. The country's economic and socio-political life shifted southwards as a result of the Amu Darya's course shifting from the Caspian Sea to the Aral Sea.

Information regarding the time of the Amu Darya's course change is provided by Abulgazi Bahadur Khan in his work «Shajarat-i Turk» (The Genealogy of the Turks): 'Thirty years before our birth, the waters of the Amu flowed above Kinora Khosta, at a place called Tugai Kara-Aigyr, and, having formed a channel there, reached Tuk-Kala and flowed into the Syr Darya. For this reason, Urgench turned into a desert' [1].

From the 16th century onwards, the city of Khiva was repeatedly proclaimed the capital of the Khorezm Khanate. Although the son of Bujakhan declared Khiva in 1556—Dustkhan—the khanate itself came to be known as the Khiva Khanate only during the reign of Arab-Muhammad-khan. Academician Y. Gulomov writes: 'Under Arab Muhammad Khan, the centre was moved from Gurganj to the city of Khiva, and from that period the khanate came to be known as the Khiva Khanate' [2].

Another academic source also notes: 'At the beginning of the 17th century, during the reign of Arab Muhammad Khan (1602–1623), after relative political stability had been established in Khorezm, Khiva effectively became the capital of the Khorezm state' [3].

In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, Turkestan was divided into the Khiva Khanate, the Bukhara Khanate, the Kokand Khanate, as well as territories controlled by the Ulus-Orda (Great Horde), the Middle Horde (Orta Horde), the Small Horde (Kichik Horde) and Kashgaria (Eastern Turkestan).

One of the reasons leading to the economic and cultural decline of Turkestan was political disunity, as well as a shift in the route of the Great Silk Road, which moved towards the coastal and maritime regions.

Secondly, internal strife between the khanates, including territorial disputes, as well as constant internecine conflicts and wars between fathers and sons, brothers and relatives over the throne, offices and wealth, led to the decline of economic and cultural life in all the khanates.

All the khanates in the territory of Turkestan, including the Khiva Khanate, found themselves caught in a political, economic and cultural stranglehold between the major, wealthy powers. The Khiva Khanate and other khanates, alongside the Bukhara and Kokand Khanates, faced a comprehensive threat from the Russian Empire to the north and the Chinese Empire to the east.

From the 16th century onwards, the population of the Khiva Khanate began to grow due to semi-nomadic Uzbek tribes migrating from the Khorezm Oasis and other territories. The settled Uzbek population accounted for 65%, Turkmen for 26%, and the remaining inhabitants were Kazakhs and Karakalpaks.

The Uzbeks settled according to tribal and clan principles in the northern part of the oasis, mainly in areas where the tributaries of the Amu Darya flowed. There were a total of 20 Uzbek tribes within the khanate, among which the Kungrats, Mangits, Naimans, Kipchaks and Kyats were the most powerful and numerous.

Abulgazi Bahadur Khan gradually began to bring the territories of the khanate under his control following the death of his brother, Isfandiyar Khan. First, in 1643, having seized the Aral Khanate and relying on the Aral Uzbeks, he

launched a campaign against the Khiva Khanate. Following fierce battles and struggles in 1644, he ascended the Khiva throne, finally consolidating his power and establishing a firm and lasting order across the khanate, which he ruled justly for nearly twenty years.

By the mid-17th century, the ruler of Khiva, Abulgazi Bahadur Khan, had managed during his reign to unite all the Uzbek clans into four tumens. At the same time, the process of uniting individual clans into tumens continued within the khanate.

Subsequently, the influence and authority of certain clans within the tumens grew, leading to a situation where one tumen came to dominate the other three. Consequently, the authority of a new leader, known as the inak (head of the tumen), was established over the former heads of the shajara—the biys—and the clan elders—the otaliks.

The new form and structure of statehood in the Khiva Khanate, where the tumen became the primary administrative unit, proved more stable than the previous tribal system. However, it also created greater scope for inter-tribal wars and conflicts.

In the khanate, where the tumen became the primary administrative unit, the chief political figure was not the khan, but the inak—the head of the strongest tumen. The khan, lacking his own administrative and political base, became nothing more than a puppet in the hands of the inaks.

The rule of the inaks in Khiva went down in history as the 'game of the khans'. It should be noted that the Chingizids, whom the inaks summoned to the Khivan throne, did not know which tumen to rely upon. Those invited were, as a rule, natives of Kazakh lands or other neighbouring states.

Sources report: 'The khans retained only the title of royal authority, whilst real power, which was subject to the will of the Inaks, was absent; they acted on their orders and spoke through their mouths, sending some to the Kazakh lands, whilst bringing others and enthroning them on the khan's throne. Thus, the Inaks were engaged in the 'khan's game' (khanbozlik)' [4].

Ultimately, the practice of 'playing with the khans', which the Inaks carried out in Khiva, led to the Inaks first unofficially, and then officially, proclaiming themselves absolute and irremovable khans.

The Inaks' rule in Khiva went down in history as the 'transformation of the khans into puppets'. The descendants of Genghis Khan, summoned by the Inaks to the Khiva throne, did not know which tumen to rely on, since the majority of those invited were from Kazakh and other warlike states, and the local officials were complete strangers to them. Ultimately, the transformation of the khans into puppets led to the inaks taking control of the Khiva Khanate into their own hands and, first unofficially and then officially, proclaiming themselves absolute and irremovable khans.

By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the power of the traditional feudal-clan system in Khiva had declined as a result of profound economic changes. At this time, the Uzbeks' transition from nomadic pastoralism to settled agriculture led to two processes: on the one hand, tribal chieftains were transformed into a new type of large-scale landowner; on the other, the formation of a class of impoverished peasant farmers and charikors (sharecroppers) was coming to an end. This gave rise to new production relations that no longer fitted within the framework of the previous clan structures.

The newly formed landed aristocracy required a strong, centralised state not only to keep the masses of landless peasants in submission, but also to unite the nomadic nobility in the struggle for land resources. The stability of land ownership required the strength of administrative and political authority. Furthermore, the growth of commodity-money relations and the development of trade in the region made the urban population keen on the creation of a powerful centralised state. Only centralised authority could put an end to the raids and plundering by nomads. The settled farmers, ruined by constant raids, were also keen to see the administrative and political system stabilised.

The founder of the new Kungrat dynasty was Muhammad Amin-inak, a member of the Kungrat clan. The Kungrat clan, alongside the Kiyat clan, led the second Uzbek confederation (tumen). The establishment of Uzbek khans from among the inaks became the most significant political event in the history of the Khiva Khanate. The Kungrat inak Muhammad Amin, having suppressed the power of tribal and clan leaders, laid the foundations for a new, centralised state apparatus.

By the end of his life, Muhammad Amin-ipak had established relative calm in the country. His administrative, fiscal and other reforms indicated that Khiva was developing into a powerful, centralised feudal state.

The historian and member of the khan's family, Sayyid Khomid Tura Komeb, describes the accession to the throne of Muhammad Amin-inak's successor, Eltuzar Khan, who assumed the title of khan, as follows: 'Like Amir Timur Barlos of Samarkand, he (Muhammad Amin-inak) first placed one of the descendants of the Chingizids on the throne. Towards the end of his life, having put the khan to death, he transformed the title of emir into that of khan.' Since his reign as emir was long, whilst his reign as khan was short, he became known by the title of emir. This emir, Muhammad Amin-inak, died whilst bearing this title. Eltuzar, however, having taken the name Muhammad Bahadur-khan, ascended the throne of the Khorezmshahs' [5].

To enhance the prestige of his family and consolidate the khan's power, Eltuzar Khan decided to marry a girl from the Sayyid clan. The Russian archaeologist and orientalist N. I. Veselovsky wrote about this: 'This marriage was forced, and the khan thus sought to consolidate his claim to power' [6]. The Russian orientalist V. V. Bartold also expressed his opinion on this matter: 'He (Eltuzar Khan — ed.) decided, in order to elevate his family, to marry the daughter of Akhunbaba-khoja, one of the Urgench Sayids. Upon learning of this, Akhunbaba-khoja hastily married his

daughter to his nephew. The khan, however, forcibly separated the girl from her young husband and took her into his harem" [7].

Russian sources note: 'Another prominent representative of the Kungrat dynasty, who ruled from 1806 to 1825, Muhammad Rahim Khan I, completed the work begun by his grandfather Muhammad Amin-inak of uniting the peoples of the Khiva Khanate and establishing a centralised system of state administration. By decree of the khan, the Supreme Council (Oliy Kengash) was established under his chairmanship" [8].

The first member of the council was the khan's trusted confidant, Muhammad Yusuf Mehtar; the second was the highly intelligent, brave, generous and affable vizier, Muhammadiyar Kushbegi; another member of the council was the khan's beloved and respected brother, Kutlugmurat-inak. Although Khojash-Mahram was not an official member of the council, he took part in its meetings. His father had been taken captive in Khorasan, brought to Khiva, where he converted to Islam and settled. Khojash-Mahram himself was freed from slavery for his military service, later became head of customs and amassed a great fortune. Khojash-Mahram built a madrasah in the north-western corner of the Pahlavan Mahmud mausoleum complex in Ichan-Kala.

According to sources, 'the qazi (judge) was also a member of the council, though the khan could occasionally remove him. The leaders of the four Uzbek clans took part in the new council. The council met on Fridays in the reception hall (kurinishkhon) of the khan's palace. Discussions began only after a shared meal' [9]. During the reign of Muhammad-Rahim Khan I, the consumption of alcohol and narcotic substances (bangi) was strictly prohibited. The khan issued a decree under which violators of this rule faced severe punishment—including mutilation (cutting off the lips). The main aim of the khan's decrees was the improvement of towns and villages, as well as care for the needs of the poor.

The Russian scholar N. I. Veselovsky wrote: 'Muhammad Rahim Khan was tall, of a large build, possessed a penetrating gaze and a strong will; he was brave and enterprising; even the strongest horse could not keep up with him for more than two hours' [10]. N. I. Veselovsky also noted: 'Muhammad Rahim Khan not only consolidated his power in the country, but also significantly enhanced the khanate's prestige'. He achieved this by eliminating rebellious relatives, suppressing the uprisings of Uzbek clans that broke out after the death of Eltuzar Khan, strengthening kinship ties with the descendants of the Sayyids through marriages, and organising successful military campaigns" [11].

Whilst in the 17th–18th centuries the borders of the territories under the Khiva Khanate's control were determined by the degree of loyalty of individual clans and tribes that recognised the khan's authority, by the 19th century the borders had become more stable. Khiva was finally established as the permanent centre, and the khan's power became absolute throughout the entire territory of the khanate. Although supreme judicial power was concentrated in the hands of the khan, the state had the institution of the qazi-khalon (chief judge). In the archival documents of the Khiva Khanate, his name appears immediately after that of the shaykh-ul-Islam in the list of persons receiving a state salary.

The qazi-khalon dealt with civil claims and disputes between subjects. Criminal cases requiring the death penalty did not fall within his jurisdiction—such cases were heard only by the khan himself. Archival sources state: 'At official receptions, the Qazi-qalun occupied the first place of honour to the khan's right, and the Qazi-askar the second' [12].

A characteristic feature of local administration in the Khiva Khanate was that, despite the presence of administrative-territorial governors (khokims), actual power at the local level often lay in the hands of large local landowners (zamin-dors). In the vilayets (provinces), the rulers (hokims) were also most often local large landowners, who, on behalf of the state, administered justice and imposed punitive measures on their lands and estates. Some important state functions in the Khiva Khanate were performed by mosques, which were themselves major landowners.

CONCLUSION: To summarise the above, it can be stated that all the titles that existed in the Khiva Khanate — inak and otalik, as well as all thirty-two administrative ranks officially registered as state offices during the reign of Abulgazi Bahadur Khan, — by the 19th century, during the reign of the Kungrat dynasty, had lost their official (official post) significance and had transformed into titles of large landowners, having no connection whatsoever with tribal (urugchilik) relations.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Bobozhonov, B. Inscriptions on the tombstones of the Shayboniylar. Wiesbaden, 1997. p. 2;
2. Khojaniyazov, G., and Hakimniyazov, J. The Devkesgen-Vazir Settlement. Nukus, 1997. p. 45;
3. Abulgazi Bahodirhon. Shajarai-Turk. Tashkent: Chulpon, 1992. p. 121;
4. Mirzo Olim Mahdum Khoja, History of Turkestan. Tashkent, 2009. p. 193;
5. Sayyid Homid Tura Komeb, Tawarikh ul-Khawani. Edited by N. Norqobulov and others. Tashkent. Academy, 2002. p. 27;
6. Veselovsky N.I. Essays on Historical and Geographical Information about the Khiva Khanate from Ancient Times to the Present. -St Petersburg, 1877. p. 254;
7. Bartold V.V. History of Cultural Life in Turkestan. Works. Vol. 2, Part 1. – Moscow, 1963. p. 284;
8. Veselovsky, N.I. Essays on the historical and geographical information regarding the Khiva Khanate from the earliest times to the present. – St Petersburg, 1877. p. 292;
9. Veselovsky, N.I. Essays on the Historical and Geographical Information Concerning the Khiva Khanate from the Earliest Times to the Present. –St Petersburg, 1877. p. 292;
10. Ibid. p. 293;

11. Veselovsky, N.I. Essays on the historical and geographical history of the Khiva Khanate from the earliest times to the present. –St Petersburg, 1877. p. 266;
12. Archive of the Khiva Khans. Vol. 21, Fol. 16.