

The Dzungar invasion

The situation on the eastern frontiers of the Kazakh khanate grew worse at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Whereas a relatively strong Kazakh khanate had been faced, in the late sixteenth–early seventeenth century, by disunited Oirat (Kalmuk) tribes, the balance began to shift in the second quarter of the seventeenth century in favour of the Dzungar taijis (taishis, nobles, chiefs) within the Oirat fold. The Dzungar chief Khara Khula (d. 1634) made a prolonged effort to unite the Oirats. Under his son Ba'atur (1634–53), the Dzungar empire may be deemed to have been fully established: he took the imperial title of khongtaiji (khongtaishi) [1]. Ba'atur persistently made war against the Kazakhs from bases in Dzungaria (northern Xinjiang, China), comprising most of Moghulistan. His son, Galdan Boshoghtu (1671–97), continuing the wars, seized practically all of Semirechye from the Kazakh khan Tauke in the early 1680s [2]. However, his preoccupation with a campaign against China in his later years somewhat weakened the pressure on the Kazakhs.

Relations between the Kazakhs and the Dzungars deteriorated sharply after the accession of Cewang Arabtan (Tsewangraptan) as Dzungar chief (1688–1727), when a fresh series of military conflicts began. The Dzungars inflicted defeat after defeat on the Kazakhs, making off with captives and cattle, seizing pastures and property, and slaughtering entire clans and villages.

This is how Valikhanov described the situation of the Kazakhs early in the eighteenth century: 'Their lands were threatened from all sides, their cattle were driven away and entire families were taken captive by the Dzungars, Volga Kalmuks, Yaik Cossacks and Bashkirs.' [3] In 1717 Kaip (Ghayb) Khan and Abu'l Khayr conducted a major campaign with a force of 30,000 men against the Dzungar khanate, but the Kazakh levies suffered a crushing defeat on the River Ayaguz [4].

In 1723 the Dzungar rulers suddenly moved their armies into Kazakhstan. This is the year of the beginning of the 'great calamity' in the traditional Kazakh oral tales called the Aqtaban-shubirindi and the Alqaqol-sulama. Taken unawares, the Kazakhs were obliged to retreat, abandoning cattle, covered wagons and other possessions. Many were killed by the Dzungar invaders, and many more perished while crossing the rivers Talas, Borolday, Arys, Chirchik and Syr Darya [5]. Sayram, Turkestan and Tashkent were occupied by the invaders.

Most of the clans of the Middle Zhuz migrated to Samarkand, while the Little Zhuz retreated into the territories of Khiva and Bukhara. The only way out of the situation was through an effort to expel the enemy; the uprising was led by the batirs (bahadurs, intrepid warriors, troop-leaders) Bugenbay, Raimbek (Rahim Beg), Tailaq, Saureq, Malaisare and Jani Beg. The organized struggle began in 1726, when the troops of all the three zhuzs began to act together. In the south-eastern area of the Turgay steppe, on the banks of the rivers Bulanti and Beleutti, in the locality of Qara-syr, which subsequently acquired the name of Qalmaq kirilgan ('the place where the Kalmuks perished'), there was a major battle between the Kazakhs and the Dzungars, in which the latter were defeated.

The serious situation on the eastern frontier having made it imperative for the three zhuzs to join forces, Abu'l Khayr, khan of the Little Zhuz, was chosen to command the troops. The victory gained by the Kazakhs in the locality of Anrakay in 1730 came about because the Kazakh troops of all three zhuzs fought side by side. The Dzungar forces were obliged to retreat eastwards back into the territory of the Dzungar khanate itself.

The unity of the Kazakh hordes did not, however, last long. The ties between the hordes, especially those of the Little and Middle Zhuzs with the Great Zhuz, were not strong enough to

sustain the alliance. Moreover, the Little and Middle Zhuzs were now themselves broken up into separate domains. The threat of a new attack by the Dzungar khanate was not eliminated by the success of 1730. Although the Dzungar empire was much weakened by a large cession of territory to the Chinese in 1732, the Dzungar ruler Galdan Cering (Galdan Tseren) (1727–45) continued to press hard upon the Kazakhs [6]. But the overthrow of the Dzungar empire by the Chinese enabled the Kazakhs, under Khan Ablai of the Middle Horde, to drive out the Dzungars from Kazakh lands in 1758.

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References:

1. Pelliot, 1930, p. 44, writes that Khongtaiji is derived from the Chinese houang t'ai-tseu, meaning 'imperial prince'
2. Barthold, 1956, pp. 160–2; Burton, 1997, pp. 336–7
3. Valikhanov, 1961, Vol. 1, p. 426
4. Kazaksko-russkie otnosheniya v XVI–XVIII vv., 1961, pp. 22–4
5. See also Howorth, 1882–1927, Vol. 2, p. 642
6. Barthold, 1956, p. 164