

Tsarist Repression of the Kazakh Elite

The 1730s saw the start of colonization of the Kazakh steppe by the Russian Empire [1], and it was from this period that the question of the relationship with the Russian administration and attitude toward its reforms would become a fundamental problem for the Kazakh ruling elite. Polarization of opposing views on the issue would eventually lead to a split amongst them. Exacerbation of relations between pro- and anti-Russian camps often ended in tragedy. Khan Abulhair, with whom the start of the Junior Juz's incorporation into the Russian Empire is associated, would meet his death at the hands of sultan Barak, an opponent of the rapprochement between Kazakh society and Russia (1748). Khan Esim Nuraliev, the grandson of khan Abulhair, was killed by supporters of batyr Syrym Datov who held that the latter was beholden to Russia (1797). Khan Zhantore Aichuvakov, known for faithfully doing the Russian administration's bidding, was murdered by men acting on the instructions of sultan Karatai (1809), who also did not wish to see the Kazakhs under the Russian Empire.

This was the time of the Empire's protectorate over the Junior and Middle Juzes. The Russian administration during that period set itself a clear objective: to weaken and bring about the gradual dissipation of the Kazakh khanate from within so as to prepare it to eventually accept Russian control. During this period the Russian government did not allow any one khan or sultan to bolster his position, artificially brooking hostility between them and supporting those sultans who would serve Russia faithfully and loyally in becoming khans. In short, in the Kazakh khans the Russian administrators were looking for men who would compliantly do their bidding, not the independently minded or strong politicians with dreams of sovereignty.

Khan Nurali's son, Karatai Nuraliev, for example, despite having been elected khan on several occasions (in 1809 and 1815 at any rate) in the Kurultai of the Junior Juz's largest clans — the Baiuly and the Alimuly — was never officially recognized as such by the Tsarist administration. The reason was the sultan's vigorous opposition to the Tsar's predatory policies, and in this respect he received strong support from his tribesmen. When asked by sultan Karatai to respect the will of those who elected him, Orenburg governor-general Volkonskii replied: "I must rejoin that unless his Majesty wills it so, none should venture to address you 'khan,' nor may you bestow upon yourself that estimable title, upon risk of legal consequences." [2]

Of course there were no laws requiring that a khan elected by the Kazakh Kurultai also had to be officially endorsed by the Tsarist administration: in this case the colonialists' intentions were simply tantamount to law.

One victim of the Tsarist administration's repressive policies was Aryngazy Abulgaziev, a khan of the Junior Juz who held considerable influence in the latter. Count Nessel'rode, a senior Tsarist official, described him thus: "Aryngazy is brave, ambitious and generous, and so may instill devotion towards himself or, through fear, grow to become sole ruler of the Horde, and then we will find ourselves moving in directions not of our own choosing but instead seeking to satisfy his demands." [3]

In May 1821 khan Aryngazy was summoned to St. Petersburg by the very Tsar himself. The defiant and intransigent khan was detained en route and sent to Kaluga, where he lived in exile for another 13 years until his death in 1833. In his homeland he was survived by a large family and children. To the sultan's request that he be given his freedom came the reply "it deigns the Tsar to find that the expected benefits of releasing sultan Aryngazy cannot compare with the dangers, which seem highly probable." [4]

Yet during this period the process of recruiting servants of the Tsar from among the ruling Kazakh elite was already successfully underway. The sultans Akhmet Zhanturin, Baimukhamed Aichuvakov and others, having been conferred military rank and other privileges by the Russian administration, took charge of detachments of the Tsar's army to suppress anti-colonial actions of their compatriots. [5]

Once the Russian system of government had been established in Kazakhstan, the way in which the Kazakh ruling elite was dealt with changed significantly [6]. To professionalize the running of Kazakh society, the colonial administration switched to training Kazakhs themselves to serve among its ranks. The younger generation of Kazakhs, recipients of a Russian education and upbringing, were meant to lead the line in terms of advocating the interests of the Russian state and Russian culture.

This objective was realized, to a certain extent, through Kazakh scholars and leading educators Ch. Ch. Valikhanov, I. Altynsarin and others who were products of Russian educational institutions. Yet at the same time they were not simply blinkered agents of their colonial masters, and thus in their behavior and sentiments there was a certain duality. On the one hand they understood that without European education and culture Kazakh society could not be freed from its medieval ways and back-wardness, but at the same time they could not help but see the negative consequences of colonial dependence. The sharply critical stance taken by Ch. Valikhanov, I. Altynsarin, Zh. Chuvakov and other leading members of Kazakh society towards the Tsarist administration's reforms evidence the dawning of a qualitatively new period in relations between the national elite and the administration.

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References:

1. The annexation of Kazakhstan to the Russian Empire is generally considered to have begun in 1731, when khan Abulkhair of the Junior Juz signed an agreement accepting the status of a Russian subject. The process of integrating the Middle and Senior Juzes was completed in 1864, when the Siberian and Syr Darya military fortification lines were combined in the city of Turkestan
2. Trudy obshchestva izucheniia Kazakhstana: Otdel istorii i etnografii, tom 7, vyp. 2 (Kyzyl-Orda, 1926), p. 92
3. Ibid., p. 147.
4. Ibid.; Istoriia Kazakhskoi SSR s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei v piati tomakh, vol. 3 (Alma-Ata, 1979), p. 168.
5. "The descendants of khan Shirgazy Aichuvakov and the sultans Baimukhamet Aichuvakov and Akhmed and Arslan Zhanturin, and the families whose relatives participated in suppressing the feudal movement of Kenesary Kasymov were freed from paying taxes." Istoriia Kazakhskoi SSR, vol. 3, p. 230.
6. As a result of administrative reforms in 1867-1868 the Kazakh steppe was blanketed in a uniform system of government. Administration was clearly military in nature. All power was concentrated in the hands of the Russian military and bureaucratic machine. The influence of the Kazakh aristocracy and sultans, bais (the rich and influential), bis (tribal leaders who served also as judges in customary courts) and village chiefs was essentially destroyed. And this system of administration was maintained until 1917.