

The Kazakh khanate from the 15th to the 18th century

Over the last three decades of the fifteenth century, the Kazakh khanate constantly increased in strength while the Moghul khanate in Moghulistan grew weaker. The Timurids also entered a period of decline towards the close of the century.

The Kazakh khans, who entered into a struggle for power in Kazakhstan against the newly risen Shaybanids, had some real strength, in that they had with them considerable numbers of nomads and also had a stable rear in Semirechye. Towards the close of the fifteenth century, Abu'l Khayr's grandson, Muhammad Shaybani (1500–10), succeeded in retaining his position in the towns of Otrar, Turkestan (Yasi), Arquq and Uzgend. The rest of the territory – Signak (Saqnaq), Sauran (Suran, Subram) and Suzak (Suzaq) – remained under the control of the Kazakhs. The Moghul khan Sultan Mahmud (1487–1506) was in possession of Tashkent and Sayram (Siram).

More and more clans and tribes came under the authority of Jani Beg and Karay, and thereafter of Karay Khan's successor, Burunduq Khan [1]. The latter's successor, Qasim, the son of Jani Beg, proved to be one of the most outstanding of the Kazakh khans and the 'gathering together of the lands' proceeded rapidly during his reign. Qasim Khan's main objective at the beginning of the sixteenth century was to secure control of the towns of the Syr Darya, over which there arose a protracted war.

Late in 1510 Muhammad Shaybani Khan was defeated and killed in the vicinity of Merv by Shah Ismail I of Persia. Qasim Khan did not fail to take advantage of this to consolidate his authority, and in the following decade he established his dominion over a very large expanse of the Kazakh steppes (Dasht-i Qazaq). At that time the boundaries of the khanate extended to the right bank of the Syr Darya in the south and included most of the towns of West Turkistan; in the south-east they took in the foothills and valleys of a considerable part of Semirechye; in the north and north-east they extended into the area of the mountainous Ulutau district and Lake Balkhash, reaching the spurs of the Karkaralinsk mountains; and in the north-west they reached the Yaik (Ural) river basin. Haydar Dughlat estimated that Qasim Khan had 1 million people under his authority [2], and, according to Babur, who praises his keeping 'the horde in such good order', he had 300,000 troops under him [3]. Grand Prince Vassily III (1503–33) of Moscow recognized the rising star by sending an embassy to the Kazakh khanate.

The Kazakh khanate had not, however, become a stable centralized state, as was apparent immediately after the death of Qasim Khan in 1518, when there were acute manifestations of dissension among the khans and sultans. At the same time, the khanate was faced by the united hostility of the Moghul and Uzbek khans. Mamash (Muhammad Husayn), the son and heir of Qasim, was killed, and Tahir became khan (1523–33). But he too proved unequal to the task of keeping his subjects together. His horde of 400,000 is said to have suddenly deserted him. He had to seek the assistance of the Kyrgyz of Moghulistan, among whom he died [4].

Internal discord and wars continued in the reign of Tahir's brother, Birilash (Buydash) Khan (1533–4), so much so that only 20,000 Kazakhs are said to have remained under his control [5]. The next khan, Tughum, another brother of Tahir Khan, suffered a shattering defeat at the hands of the Moghul khan, Abdu'l Rashid (1533–60), in which Tughum himself, along with 37 'sultans' of the Kazakhs, were killed and the rumour even spread in remote areas that the Kazakhs had been annihilated as a people [6].

But a revival of Kazakh power seems thereafter to have taken place under Qasim Khan's son, Haqq Nazar Khan (1538–80) [7]. The English merchant, Anthony Jenkinson, who visited

Bukhara in 1558–9, heard reports of ‘the Cossacks of the law of Mahomet’ – that is, the Kazakhs – threatening Tashkent, an Uzbek possession. Together with the Kyrgyz, who were similarly threatening Kashghar, these were held to be ‘two barbarous Nations... of great force, living in the fields without House or Towne.’ [8] These events probably had some connection with an invasion of Moghulistan that Haqq Nazar Khan undertook some time before 1560, defeating and killing cAbdu’l Rashid Khan’s son, Abdu’l Latif [9].

Exploiting internal strife within the Noghay Horde, Haqq Nazar won over many of the Noghay mirzas (in Persian, sons, descendants of amirs and rulers, hence princes, nobles) to his side and annexed the territory along the left bank of the River Yaik. In 1580 Sayfi, the author of a Turkish work, held the Kazakhs to number 200,000 families. He described them as Hanafite Muslims (as were most of the Muslims in Transoxania). They had sheep and camels, and exported to Bukhara coats made of very fine wool. They were nomads and had their dwellings on carts [10].

The aged Shighay Khan (1580–2), a grandson of Jani Beg, succeeded Haqq Nazar, and the next khan was his son, Tevke (Tevekkel, Tevkel, possibly a Turkic form of Tavakkul, 1582–98). Tevke Khan succeeded gradually in consolidating his authority in the khanate. He sent an embassy to Tsar Feodor in 1594 seeking support against the Uzbek ruler cAbdullah Khan (1557–98) and the Siberian khan Kūchūm [11]. The Russian documents refer to him as the ‘Kazakh and Kalmuk king’, which suggests that he also had some Kalmuks as his subjects or chiefs. This might have been the result of an earlier conflict with the Kalmuks in which Tevke had carried out a raid into Kalmuk (Oirat) territory, which had in return brought upon the Kazakhs ‘a devastating irruption of the infidels’ [12].

In their conflicts with the Uzbeks, the Kazakhs felt at a particular disadvantage in having to rely on bows and arrows alone, whereas the Uzbeks also had firearms. One objective behind the embassy to Moscow in 1594 was to secure these weapons even at the cost of accepting vassalage to the tsar [13].

Just before cAbdullah Khan’s death in 1598, Tevke launched an invasion of the Uzbek dominions and defeated, at a place between Tashkent and Samarkand, a large army that cAbdullah Khan had sent against him. In 1598, after cAbdullah Khan’s death, Tevke raised ‘an immense host from among the tribes of West Turkistan and steppe-inhabiting Uzbeks’ and seized ‘Aksi, Andijan, Tashkent and Samarkand’. His army of ‘70–80,000’, however, suffered a setback at Bukhara – which was nominally under the last Shaybanid khan, Pir Muhammad – and he retreated to Tashkent, where he died after an illness [14]. Tevke’s conquests were soon retaken by the Uzbeks, but Tashkent and Turkestan remained with the Kazakhs until 1723 [15].

In the seventeenth century Kazakhstan presented the picture of a politically fragmented country. No stable economic and political ties could be formed between the Kazakh zhuzs. The difficulties standing in the way of uniting the Kazakh lands into a stable centralized state may be attributed to the economic backwardness of the Kazakh khanate and the predominance of a natural economy, marked by the decline of the towns in southern Kazakhstan.

Feuding increased in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, when Ishim (Esim) Khan (1598–1628) succeeded his brother Tevke. Some of the more powerful Kazakh sultans became virtually independent of the khan. Prominent among them was Tursun Muhammad, who, installed by Imam Quli, the Uzbek ruler of Bukhara, proclaimed himself khan at Tashkent (1614–27) while Ishim ruled in Turkestan [16]. After Ishim Khan, the situation of the Kazakh khanate deteriorated even further; the Dzungars [17] seized part of Semirechye, subjugating the Kazakh nomads in the area. Ishim’s son Jahangir (1630–80) won a great victory against the Dzungars in the early 1640s but ultimately lost his life in a battle with the Dzungar ruler Galdan

(1671–97) [18]. When the throne passed in 1680 to Tauke (or Tauka) Khan (1680–1718), he took up the cudgels against the old nobility, and brought in new nobles, bis or begs (lords), of his own, to play a major role in the khan's councils [19]. How far this improved matters is difficult to say.

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References:

1. Howorth, 1882–1927, Vol. 2, pp. 628–9
2. This figure is given for 'the army', not for the people (Haydar Dughlat, 1898, pp. 82, 273). We may assume with Barthold, 1956, p. 153, that Haydar Dughlat meant to give the number of all the people (Kazakhs) under Qasim
3. Babur, 1995, p. 18; 1922, pp. 23–4; Howorth, 1882–1927, Vol. 2, pp. 631–2; Haydar Dughlat, 1898, p. 273
4. Haydar Dughlat, 1898, pp. 82, 273, 373, 374, 377, 379, 386
5. Ibid., p. 82, where Birilash appears as Buldash
6. Barthold, 1956, p. 157. Here Barthold must have had in mind statements in Haydar Dughlat, 1898, pp. 82, 273, about the total disappearance of the Kazakhs by the year 1537–8
7. Howorth, 1882–1927, Vol. 2, pp. 632–40, calls him Ak (Aq) Nazar
8. Jenkinson, 1906, p. 25
9. Churas, 1976, Persian text, pp. 10–11, where we are told that cAbdu'l Rashid Khan took severe vengeance and drove out the invaders; but the statement that he captured and killed Haqq Nazar Khan is palpably wrong
10. Barthold, 1956, p. 159
11. Howorth, 1882–1927, Vol. 2, pp. 636–9
12. Barthold, 1956, pp. 159–60. If the 'irruption' led to Tevke seeking refuge with the Uzbek khan Nauroz (d. 1556) at Tashkent, this must have occurred long before Tevke became the khan of the Kazakhs
13. Burton, 1997, p. 80
14. Iskandar Munshi, 1350/1971, Vol. 1, pp. 553, 591–2; cf. Burton, 1997, pp. 95, 102–3
15. Barthold, 1956, p. 160
16. MIKKh, 1968, p. 315; Howorth, 1882–1927, Vol. 2, pp. 639–40, calls him Ishim Khan.
17. Howorth and some other historians write Sungar, but it designates the same people. See Grousset, 1964, p. 605, note 1.
18. Burton, 1997, pp. 219–20, 126. Jahangir could not have been killed by Galdan in 1652, because Galdan (b. 1644) only became the Dzungar ruler in 1671.
19. Tauke is called Tiavka in Howorth, 1882–1927, Vol. 2, pp. 640–2. He was a son of Jahangir