

Kazakhstan as a part of Russia: the struggle for independence

The Kazakh khanate was obliged to accept the suzerainty of Russia partly because of the military and political situation that had developed owing to the Dzungar excursions and the consequential economic difficulties, the fragmentation of the khanate and civil strife. There was also, of course, the threat of the use of force by tsarist Russia. In 1726 there was a meeting in the Karakalpak steppes between a Russian envoy, Mulla Maksyuta Yunusov (Mulla Maqsud b. Yunus), and Abu'l Khayr Khan, then leader of the Little Horde. Following the negotiations, Abu'l Khayr sent a mission to St Petersburg headed by Koybagar Kobekov for the purpose of gaining the 'protection' of Russia.

On 8 September 1730 a mission from Abu'l Khayr headed by Seitkul (Seyed-Qul) Koydagulov and Kutlumbet Koshtaev came to Ufa and petitioned Empress Anna Ivanovna (1730–40) for the incorporation of the Little Zhuz into the Russian empire [1]. On 19 February 1731 the empress signed a deed addressed to Abu'l Khayr Khan and 'the whole of the Kazakh people' on their voluntary acceptance of Russian nationality [2]. A special mission headed by A. I. Tevkelev was dispatched to the Kazakh steppes on 30 April 1731 to inform the Kazakhs of the deed and to administer the oath of allegiance to them. On 10 October Tevkelev summoned the Kazakh leaders to a meeting at which the legal act on the voluntary incorporation of the Little Horde into Russia was signed by Abu'l Khayr, followed by Bukenbay, Iset and his brother Mirza Khuday Nazar, and a further 27 Kazakh chiefs.

On 15 December 1731 Tevkelev, Abu'l Khayr and Bukenbay sent emissaries to Semeke Khan of the Middle Zhuz with the proposal that he should accept subjection to Russia. Semeke expressed the willingness of his Horde to enter the Russian empire, the oath of allegiance was administered to him and he 'affixed his seal' [3].

The sultans and begs of the Great Zhuz, Qodar and Tole, and batirs Satay, Qangeldy and Bolek then approached the empress herself directly with a request for admission to the Russian empire. On 19 September 1738 Empress Anna confirmed by deed to Jolbarys Khan that the Great Horde had been admitted into Russia. However, such was the remoteness of the Great Horde from Russia, and so vulnerable was it to pressure from Dzungaria, that it was difficult to give effect to the incorporation of these Kazakh lands into Russia. It was, indeed, not until 1846 that the Kazakhs of the Great Horde actually accepted Russian suzerainty.

Meanwhile, from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, Russia began to build lines of defence in Kazakhstan, along the rivers Yaik, Irtysh and Ishim. The defence works afforded great scope for the Russians to colonize Kazakhstan. They acquired the best and most fertile land, with the result that the area of grazing land was reduced and traditional migrations were disrupted. The tsarist government also issued a number of decrees restricting the movements of the Kazakhs. These measures caused unrest in the steppes which developed into serious disturbances and revolts.

This explains the active participation of the Kazakhs in the peasant war of 1773–5 led by Pugachev. From 1783 to 1797, half a century after the Kazakhs of the Little Zhuz had accepted tsarist-Russian tutelage, a resistance movement became active under the leadership of Srym Datov. Between 1833 and 1838, the movement headed by Isatay Taymanov and Mahambet Utemisov was transformed into a large-scale anti-colonial uprising of the Kazakhs of the Bukey khanate.

These uprisings compelled the tsarist government to take new administrative measures. The 'Regulations governing the Siberian Kazakhs' were adopted in 1822 and the 'Regulations

governing the Orenburg Kazakhs' in 1824. Under these regulations a new administrative system was introduced in the Middle and Little Hordes. The rule of the khan was abolished. Administrative districts (okrugs) were established and okrug authorities set up, each headed by an elder sultan. Their orders had to be approved by the Russian authorities. Village elders were, however, to be elected by the local population.

The new system of government, which strengthened the authority of Russian officials, caused much dissatisfaction among the people, especially the clan nobles – the aristocrats of the steppe. This led to the most extensive Kazakh uprising against tsarist Russia. The uprising of Khan Kenesari Kasymov and his intrepid lieutenant Naurazbey began in 1824 and lasted until 1847, when both Kenesari and Naurazbey were captured and tortured to death by Kyrgyz chiefs. All the three Hordes were involved in this rebellion, and Kenesari had aspired to create a united Kazakh khanate.

The incorporation of Kazakhstan into Russia was largely completed by the middle of the nineteenth century. The final touches were added in 1863–4, when Russian troops occupied the towns of Suzaq, Chulaq-Kurgan, Aulie-Ata, Chimkent and Turkestan.

K. M. Baipakov, B. E. Kumekov

References:

1. Arkhiv vneshney politiki Rossii, fol. Kirgiz-kaysatskie dela, 1730–1
2. Kazaksko-russkie otnosheniya v XVI–XVIII vv., 1961, pp. 40–1
3. Kazaksko-russkie otnosheniya v XVI–XVIII vv., 1961, pp. 60–1, 101–3