



THE REASONS FOR THE CRISIS AND THE END OF THE KHIVA KHANATE

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Article history:	Abstract:
<p>Received: 30th June 2025 Accepted: 26th July 2025</p>	<p>This article examines the complex political history of the Khiva Khanate, from its formation in the 16th century to its decline and eventual end. It details the constant internal strife, power struggles among competing factions of Uzbek and Turkmen tribes, and the frequent changes in leadership that plagued the khanate. The text highlights how these internal conflicts, coupled with external pressures from neighboring powers like the Bukhara Khanate and the Russian Empire, contributed to the state's political instability. Key events discussed include the relocation of the capital to Khiva, the reigns of influential figures such as Abulgazi Khan and Shergozi Khan, and the devastating invasion by Nadir Shah of Iran. The article argues that a combination of internal fragmentation, dynastic rivalries, and growing external interference ultimately led to the crisis and the collapse of the Khiva Khanate.</p>
<p>Keywords: Khiva Khanate, Political instability, Dynastic struggle, Nadir Shah, Internal conflicts, Uzbek tribes, Turkmen tribes, Russian Empire.</p>	

INTRODUCTION

The Khiva Khanate, a significant state in the history of Central Asia, emerged in the 16th century following the decline of the Shaybanid dynasty. As one of the three major Uzbek khanates of the region, it played a crucial role in the political, economic, and cultural landscape for centuries. However, the state was constantly plagued by internal strife and external pressures that would ultimately lead to its downfall. This article delves into the complex reasons behind the crisis and the end of the Khiva Khanate, exploring the relentless power struggles, dynastic conflicts, and foreign interventions that weakened the state from within and without. By examining key historical events and the actions of its leaders, we can better understand the factors that contributed to the demise of this once-powerful Central Asian state.

ANALYSIS OF SOURCES AND LITERATURE

The provided article on the Khiva Khanate draws its information from a blend of primary historical accounts and broader, often anonymous, written sources. The author's frequent and specific references to key historical figures and their works demonstrate a reliance on established Central Asian historical literature.

The most notable primary sources cited are the works of two prominent historians and rulers of the region:

Abulgazi Khan (1643-1663): The article repeatedly references "The Turkish Shajarai" (Shajara-i Turk), a seminal work of Chagatai Turkic historiography. Abulgazi Khan's account is a cornerstone of the text, providing direct insights into the political events, dynastic struggles, and leadership changes of the 16th and 17th centuries. The author uses his account to describe Abulgazi's own life, his exile, and his rise to power, lending a personal and authoritative voice to the narrative.

Muhammad Riza Agahi (1809-1874): The article cites Agahi, a 19th-century historian of Khiva, on multiple occasions. His chronicles are used to detail the rapid succession of rulers in the late 17th and early 18th centuries and to characterize figures like Arangkhan. Agahi's work provides a critical perspective on the political fragmentation of the khanate in its later years, helping to build the case for its decline.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Fall of Khiva Formation and political history of Khiva khanate. After the death of Shaibanikhan in 1510, the Khorezm region was conquered by King Ismail of Iran. In 1510-1512 Khorezm was ruled by the deputies of the king of Iran. However, in 1512, popular movements against the Iranians began in the Khorezm region. The movement was led by Umar Sheikh, a judge in the city of Wazir (in Ustyurt, 60 km from Old Urgench, founded by Mustafa Khan, an Uzbek khan in



the 15th century). The rebels massacred Iranian deputies and their troops in the cities of Vazir, Urgench, Khiva and Khazarasp in Khorezm. In 1512, the descendants of Sheikh Ota, one of the most influential sheikhs of Khorezm, sent a letter to Elbarskhan, a descendant of the Berka sultan of nomadic Uzbeks, inviting him to the throne of Khorezm. When Elbarskhan ascended the throne, he expelled the Iranians from the country and established a de facto independent khanate. He greatly expanded the territory of the country to the southern part of present-day Turkmenistan, the northern province of Serakhs in Iran, Mangyshlak, Abulkhan, and Durun. However, there was no political unity between the Uzbek sultans and princes. Soon there was a power struggle between them. Taking advantage of these struggles, Ubaydullah, the ruler of Bukhara, succeeded in conquering Khorezm for a short time in 1537-1538. The defeated Avanishkhan and his family were executed by the Shaybanis[1]. Ubaydullah's reign did not last long. Unable to withstand the tyranny of Ubaydullah, the Khorezmians, led by Anushakhan's successors, revolted against the Bukhara people. In 1538, Ubaydullah again marched on Khorezm. The Bukhara army was defeated at Kardaronkhos, between Khazarasp and Khiva. In Khorezm, which was liberated from the Shaybanids, internal strife has intensified. The centrifugal actions of the rulers of cities and regions such as Urgench, Kat, Yangi Shahar, Khiva, and Khazarasp also intensified, and they practically considered themselves independent. Some cities were ruled by two rulers at the same time (for example, Polat Sultan and Temir Sultan in Khiva). The rivalry intensified, especially between the Elbarskhan and Anushakhan dynasties. In the 16th century, according to Abdul Ghazi, as a result of such struggles, dozens of khans were temporarily removed from power. As a result, the central government was almost in crisis. Conflicts and political tensions, in turn, disrupted economic life. In the second half of the 16th century, during the reign of Hadji Khan (Haji Muhammad Khan, 1558-1593, 1598-1602), the civil wars in Khorezm were stopped and peace and tranquility were established. Irrigation and agriculture, handicrafts and trade were given special attention, and foreign trade and relations flourished. During the reign of Hadjimkhan the capital was moved from Urgench to Khiva [about the date of Khiva becoming the capital - 1556, 1598, 1602-1621, 1611-1611, 1610-1612, 1557-1603]. (in some sources in the 70s of the XVI century, and in some in the 90s). The main reason for this was the shortage of water in

and around Urgench as a result of the diversion of the Amu Darya into the Caspian Sea, and secondly, the political and economic position of Khiva during this period, which became a major trade center. After the capital was moved to Khiva, the state became known as the Khiva Khanate. Meanwhile, the ruler of Bukhara, Abdullah II, succeeded in re-establishing the Shaybani state and began efforts to regain control of Khorezm. For example, after several marches in 1593 Khorezm again fell into the hands of the Shaybanids. Defeated by Abdullah, Hadji Khan left Khiva and fled to Iran with a group of navkars and took refuge in the palace of King Abbas. After the death of Abdullah II in 1598, Hadji Khan returned to Khorezm with the permission of King Abbas. Under the new conditions, he took over the management of Urgench and the Minister and handed over Khiva and Kat to Arab Muhammad Khan and Hazarasp to Isfandiyar Sultan. In 1600, Hadji Khan handed over control of the fortresses of Urgench and Vazir to his sons from Turkey, and he himself remained in Khiva with his youngest son, Arab Muhammad Khan. When Hajim Khan died in 1601 at the age of 83, his son Arab Muhammad Khan (1602-1623) ascended the throne. During the early years of the reign of the Arab Muhammad Khan, the struggle for the throne continued. In particular, in 1605, representatives of the Naiman clan planned to ascend the throne of Khusrav Sultan, a descendant of Elbarskhan. However, the conspiracy was exposed and Khusrav Sultan was executed. Two years later, on the advice of the Uyghur elders, a man named Salih Sultan claimed the throne, and the revolt was suppressed and Salih Sultan was killed. By 1616, the sons of the Arab Muhammad Khan had joined the struggle for the throne and career. He had seven sons, Isfandiyarkhan, Abyssinian, Elbars, Abdulgozi, Sharif Muhammad, Khorezmshah and Afghan Sultan. Isfandiyar was appointed Minister and Governor of Urgench in Hazarasp, Abdul Ghazi Sultan Katta, and Abyssinian and Elbasr sultans. Each of the khan's children was a contender for the throne[2]. The actions of the Abyssinian sultan and the Elbars sultans were especially sharp. Conflicts between fathers and children escalated into a bloody war. In 1621, near the Stone Rift Valley (near Khiva), a battle took place between Arab Muhammad Khan and his sons, the armies of the Abyssinian and Elbars sultans. Although Isfandiyar and Abdul Ghazi fought on their father's side, Arab Muhammad Khan was defeated. Arab Muhammad Khan was first blinded and sent to Khiva. In 1623, near the fortress of Qom, the Arab



Muhammad Khan was killed by his wives, young sons and two grandsons by his sons, the Habash and Elbars sultans. Isfandiyar fled to Iran (although he was allowed to go to Mecca), while Abdul Ghazi fled to Bukhara and survived. When Isfandiyarkhan Durun heard that his father had been killed in 1623, he gathered an army from the Abdulkhan Mountains, the Taka, Yavmut, and Yellow tribes of the Turkmen and marched on Urgench. In the 23-day battle between Isfandiyarkhan and the Abyssinian-Elbars forces near Urgench, the united armies were crushed by the Isfandiyar army. Elbars was captured and executed. The Abyssinian sought refuge from the Karakalpaks along the Syrdarya. However, he did not find refuge here and was captured with his navkars, handed over to Isfandiyarkhan, and all of them were executed. From 1623 to 1643 Isfandiyarkhan ruled the throne of Khiva khanate. Isfandiyarkhan relied on Turkmen tribal leaders for twenty years. Turkmen were appointed to high positions in the khanate and were given great privileges. As a result, Uzbek tribes became increasingly dissatisfied with Isfandiyarkhan's policies. When Isfandiyarkhan ascended the throne, he destroyed the Naiman tribes. The Uzbek tribes of the khanate were divided into three parts, one moved to Mangit, one to the land of the Kazakhs, and the other to Movarunnahr. The Uzbeks, who soon returned to their homeland, were killed by Isfandiyarkhan. Even during the Isfandiyarkhan khanate, peace and tranquility were not established in Khorezm. The struggle for the throne continued as in previous times. Dissatisfied with Isfandiyarkhan, who had handed over political power in the khanate to the Turkmen, forces plotted to overthrow him. These forces were led by the khan's brother Abulgazi. The influence of the Uzbeks living at the confluence of the Amu Darya with the Aral Sea (along the Aral Sea) (where the Uzbek bells had a large political position) also increased the political life of the khanate.

According to sources, in 1643, the Uzbeks along the Aral Sea raised Sultan Abulgazi (1643-1663) as khan. Abulgazi Khan, a great statesman and historian in the history of Khorezm statehood, had a difficult life. Abdul Ghazi Khan was forced to live in exile for many years (more than twenty years) until his father, Arab Muhammad, ascended the throne. He first lived under the protection of the ruler of Bukhara Imamqulikhan, and then for about two years in the palace of the Kazakh sultan Eshimkhan. After that he came to Tashkent and lived there for two years. Abul-Ghazi, who had returned to Khiva from Tashkent via Bukhara, was arrested by Isfandiyarkhan on charges of

aggression and deported to Isfahan to the king of Iran. Abulgazi, who had lived in captivity for ten years in the Taborak fortress near Isfahan, escaped captivity in 1639 with the help of his guards[3]. After that, he lived in the village of Mohin in Khorasan for about a year, and among the Mangyshlak Turkmen for about two years. Then the Kalmyk khan invited him to his place. After living here for about a year, Abulgazi returned to Urgench in 1643 with the great power of the Kalmyk khan and ascended the throne of Khiva with the help of the Uzbeks of the Aral Sea. In addition to pursuing a policy of settling Uzbek tribes, Abulgazikhan divided them into four groups, from Doyakhotun (near Darganota), which borders Bukhara, to the Aral Sea. Abulgazikhan also marched on the Turkmen around Khorasan, Southern Turkmenistan, Tajan, Murgab, Artek, Gurlan, Abulkhan and Mangyshlak in 1645-1650. He tried to expand the borders of the khanate. At the khan's behest, the inhabitants of Wazir Castle were relocated to the rebuilt Small Wazir village near Gurlan Fortress. In 1646, by order of Abulgazikhan, the Urgencharna canal was excavated and a new fortress was built near it, which was named New Urgench. Part of the population of Old Urgench will be relocated here. In 1648, the Gaziabad Canal was dug and a border fortification was built nearby. Abulgazikhan, who was engaged in public administration and creative work, also left an invaluable legacy as a historian. Around 1657, Abdul Ghazi wrote a treatise on medicine, Manafi 'ul-insan (The Beneficial Things for Man), and in 1658-1664, he wrote a historical work, The Turkish Shajarai. During his lifetime, Abulgazikhan handed over the throne of the Khiva khanate to his son Anushakhan (1663-1687) and died six months later. Anushakhan continued his father's work in order to increase the status and power of the Khiva khanate. He made several military expeditions to Bukhara, Samarkand and Khorasan to strengthen and expand the khanate's borders. Attitudes toward the Turkmen, who had shown courage in Anushakhan's military campaigns, have changed. The khan allowed the Turkmen to move to and around the Khorezm oasis. In 1687, Anushakhan was assassinated by the courtiers. His son Khudoydod (1687-1688) ascended the throne. Unfortunately, the khanate of the new ruler did not last long. According to Agahi, Khudoydod's younger brother Arangkhan [also known in some literatures as Ernakkhan or Erangkhan] was a martyr who began to gain a reputation as a knowledgeable and just khan in politics. However, the reign of Arangkhan (1689-1690) did not last long. In



1690 he was killed in a battle with the Aral Uzbeks. After the death of Arangkhan, the khan of Bukhara Subhanqulikhan transferred his man Shahniyaz (1690-1707) to the throne of Khiva, and in fact turned the Khiva khanate into a vassal state of Bukhara. Therefore, although Shahniyaz declared himself khan, he could not escape the influence of Bukhara during his career. By the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, the Khiva khanate was experiencing political disintegration, struggles for the throne, and the efforts of local rulers to achieve independence. Because the governors of the provinces disobeyed the khan, the khan of Khiva became a puppet in the hands of palace officials and local rulers. That is why in some written sources of the XVIII century Khiva khanate was called "Five Fortress". The subordination of the Khazarasp, Khanka, Urgench, Kat, and Shavat fortresses to the central government was superficial. In 1703, Shahniyaz sent a letter to the Russian ruler Peter I in order to get rid of the influence of Bukhara and strengthen the central government. The letter called for the annexation of the Khiva Khanate to Russia[4]. The decree of Peter I on the annexation of Khiva to Russia was given in 1707 to the new ruler of Khiva, Arab Muhammad (1707-1715). However, in the context of the escalating political struggle in Khiva, the label did not attract anyone's attention. In general, according to Ogahi, from the time of Arangkhan to the time of Shergozikhan, dozens of rulers changed in Khiva. The reign of Shergozikhan (1715-1728) was rich in political events. His reign was marked by the struggle against the arbitrary actions of the Uzbek, Turkmen and Karakalpak aristocracy. By this time, the political situation among the Uzbeks along the Aral Sea had worsened. The main reason for this was the struggle for independence of the Uzbeks living along the Aral Sea, belonging to the Kungrad, Mangit, Khojayli and Kipchak tribes. Sheralibi, one of the rulers of Mangit, who led these struggles, refused to submit to the Khiva khanate and declared the Aral Sea region an independent government. Although Shergozikhan tried to suppress the movement, he was unable to do so. By the beginning of the 18th century, the Russian government's interference in the internal affairs of the Khiva Khanate had intensified. Russian authorities were planning to invade Central Asia, including the Khiva Khanate. The expedition of the Russian ruler Peter I, led by Bekovich-Cherkassky to Khiva in 1717, was organized for the same purpose. However, as a result of Shergozikhan's cunning, the 6,000-strong expedition was wiped out overnight. However, it was

not until the conquest of Central Asia that the Tsarist government continued its efforts. Civil strife, princes' quarrels, and high taxes exacerbated the khanate's economic situation. As a result, in 1728 an uprising broke out in Khiva. Here the slaves revolted against the tyranny of the khan. As a result, Shergozikhan and his close associates were killed.

During the reign of the Kazakh sultan Elbarskhan (1728-1740), who ascended the throne after Shergozikhan's death, the Khiva khanate's military power weakened as a result of internal struggles and numerous looting raids on neighboring territories. Taking advantage of this situation, the king of Iran Nadirshah in 1740 launched an attack on the Khiva khanate. Initially, there was a fierce battle between the Khiva army and the Iranians near Khazarasp. In this battle, the Khiva army was defeated and retreated to the Khazarasp fortress. When the Iranians besieged the fortress of Khazarasp for a long time and could not occupy it, they attacked the fortress of Khanka. At that moment, the situation changed and the Mangit beys, who were supporting Elbarskhan, moved towards Nodirshah. As a result, Elbarskhan was defeated, captured and executed by Nadirshah.

After Elbarskhan's defeat, Abul-Khairkhan, the leader of a small Kazakh tribe of Juz, who had acquired Russian citizenship, was transferred to the Khiva throne. Abul-Khairkhan sent a letter to Nadirshah to make peace and received a refusal. Shortly afterwards, Nadirshah marched on Khiva for the second time and captured it. Abul-Khairkhan fled to the Kazakh steppes. Nodirshah appointed Ortiqbek and Khorzodbek, the beys of Mangit, as his deputies. However, the Uzbeks along the Aral Sea refused to obey Nodirshah and made Nurali, the son of Abul-Khairkhan, their khan. In 1741, a revolt against the Iranians broke out in Khiva, killing Nadirshah's deputies and massacring his soldiers. Nuralikhan was transferred to Khiva as khan. However, Nuralli Khan had little political influence as khan.

In 1741, under the leadership of Nadirshah's son Nasrullo, he marched on Khiva again and drove Nuralikhan and his followers out of Khiva. However, his reign did not last long. In 1746, Abdul Ghazi II was killed in a conspiracy in Khiva by Mangit's henchmen. Then, with the consent of Nodirshah, in 1747, Taibkhan (Kaipkhan) (1747-1757), the brother of the Kazakh sultan Abdulkhair, was enthroned. Sources mention that Taibkhan was an extremely cruel ruler. When he ascended the throne of Khiva, he first executed Huzurbek, one of the Mangit cows, and his supporters in order to free his government from the



influence of the cows. The highest positions in the country were given to Kazakh princes. Taibkhan intensified his oppression of the population and in 1756 collected an additional tax of 40,000 tenge from the people of Khiva. This led to a popular uprising in Khiva. Taibkhan left the throne and fled to the Kazakh steppes. His brother Abdullah Khan soon took power. Taking advantage of the internal strife in Khiva, the ruler of Bukhara, Muhammad Rahimbi, began an attempt to seize Khiva. For this purpose, he enthroned his man Temur Gozikhan (1757-1763) on the throne of Khiva. Although Temur Gozikhan did not establish sufficient political stability in Khiva, the status of the Uzbek bells in the khanate increased during his reign. Temur Gozikhan ruled for several years and was assassinated as a result of a palace conspiracy. After his death, the power of Khiva passed into the hands of the Kazakh sultan Tavkakh (1763). However, he soon lost his throne. In 1763, Muhammad Amin became the de facto ruler of Khiva.

CONCLUSION

The history of the Khiva Khanate from the 16th to the 18th century is a compelling case study of a state whose decline was driven by a perpetual state of internal crisis and growing external threats. The article's analysis demonstrates that while the khanate's rulers sought to maintain its power and expand its borders, their efforts were consistently undermined by deep-seated problems.

The primary cause of its instability was the unending struggle for power among competing dynasties and tribal factions. This constant infighting prevented the establishment of a strong, unified central government and weakened the khanate's ability to respond to challenges. Key events, such as the assassination of rulers, the rebellion of sons against their fathers, and the frequent change of leadership, created a cycle of political and economic decay.

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