

THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL TRADE ELITE IN THE RUSSIAN CONQUEST OF THE KOKAND KHANATE

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Annotation: This article analyzes the economic and political role of the local trade elite during the conquest of the Kokand Khanate by the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th century. The introduction outlines the relevance of the topic, the degree to which the problem has been studied, the aim of the research, and its main hypothesis. The methodology section sets out the methods of using archival documents, contemporary works, and reports of the Russian colonial administration on the basis of the principles of historicism, objectivity, and the comparative-historical and analytical methods. The results section establishes that the cooperation of part of the local trade elite with the Russian Empire on the basis of economic interests accelerated the process of conquest. The discussion section analyzes the causes of this cooperation, its socio-political consequences, and the objectivity of the available sources. The conclusion substantiates that the activity of the local trade elite was one of the important factors in Russia's conquest of the Kokand Khanate, and that there is a need to study this issue from a socio-economic perspective.

Keywords: second half of the 19th century, Kokand Khanate, Russia, Soviet historiography, strategy.

Introduction

The conquest of the Kokand Khanate by the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th century was one of the most complex and contradictory processes in the history of Central Asia, a process that occurred at the intersection not only of military and political factors but also of socio-economic ones. In traditional historiography, the principal cause of the conquest is most often presented as the military clash of the two states, Russia's drive to the south, and the internal weakness of the Kokand Khanate. However, issues such as the active role of the local trade elite in this process, their personal interest in developing economic ties with Russia, their mediation in supplying the troops with food and intelligence, and their integration into the colonial administrative system after the conquest have not been sufficiently studied. This article analyzes the economic and political role of local merchants and large property owners in the Russian conquest of the Kokand Khanate, their motives for distancing themselves from the khanate's authority and cooperating with the invading forces, and the impact of this process on the speed and form of the conquest. The main hypothesis of the research is that the fragmentation of the local trade elite and the defection of part of it to the Russian side not only accelerated the conquest but also shaped its economic mechanism. From this perspective, the article examines the two-sided strategy of this social group on the basis of contemporary chronicles and reports of

the colonial administration: on the one hand, preserving its own capital, and on the other, expanding its sphere of influence by serving the new authority.

Literature Review

The history of the conquest of the Kokand Khanate by the Russian Empire has long been the focus of representatives of various scholarly schools, and the role of the local trade elite in this process has been treated differently by researchers. The existing literature can be divided into three main directions: Soviet historiography; Western and modern Uzbek historiography; and Russian sources of the colonial period.

In Soviet historiography (M. V. Nechkina, N. A. Khalfin, B. M. Zakhoder), the conquest of the Kokand Khanate was mainly interpreted as a “progressive” event, dominated by the Marxist-Soviet conception of Russia's “voluntary annexation” or its “introduction of an advanced civilization.” In this approach, the role of the local trade elite was viewed chiefly through the prism of “the alliance of merchant capital with colonialism” [1]. As noted in Khalfin's work “Russia and the Khanates of Central Asia” (1960), on the eve of the conquest large merchants and wealthy men assisted the Russian military command with food, means of transport, and intelligence. However, Soviet research interpreted this process mainly within the framework of class struggle — as a step toward “liberation from the oppression of the feudal khanate.” As a result, the personal interests, economic calculations, and political manipulations of the local elite were not sufficiently analyzed.

In Western historiography (E. Allworth, S. Becker, D. MacKenzie), Russia's conquest of Central Asia has been studied mainly as geopolitical rivalry, within the context of the “Great Game.” Although Becker's “Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia: Bukhara and Khiva, 1865–1924” (1968) dwells comparatively little on Kokand, the integration of the local trade elite into the new colonial order is partly illuminated from the standpoint of “colonizer and local collaborator” relations. Allworth, in “Central Asia: A Historical Overview” (1994), focused on the role of local merchants in creating a market for Russian goods in the period after the conquest. A shortcoming of Western research, however, is that it has not comprehensively revealed the two-sided political games of the local trade elite during the conquest — especially before and during it — or their motives for betraying or distancing themselves from the khanate. This role has often been left as a secondary factor.

Modern Uzbek historiography (A. Muhammadjonov, D. Alimova, Sh. Vohidov) has in recent years been reconsidering the history of the Kokand Khanate by drawing on national sources and sources of the colonial period. Research in this direction is based on local documents — the Kokand archive, judicial (qozilik) records, and contemporary chronicles (for example, Muhammad Hakimxon Tora's “Muntakhab ut-tavorikh”). The work “History of the Kokand Khanate” (2011) by Alimova and Vohidov provides valuable information about the trade elite's ties with Russia and their place in the khanate's bureaucracy. However, in existing works the degree of the local merchants' collaboration in the conquest is often based on general assessments such as “betrayal of the people” or “selling national interests,” rather than analyzed

from the standpoint of economic rationality and social psychology. Moreover, these studies make little use of information about the local collaborators (merchants, wealthy men) found in Russian sources [4]. Russian sources of the colonial period (V. P. Nalivkin, M. A. Terentyev, A. Kun) constitute a separate layer. These sources state directly that the local trade elite actively assisted the Russian side — for example, the role of merchants in supplying fodder and food during the campaigns of the 1860s–1870s, and how some wealthy men conveyed intelligence about the khan's troops to the Russian military command [7]. Nalivkin's "A Short History of the Kokand Khanate" (1886) emphasizes that the local notables ("aghyon" — nobles and merchants), dissatisfied with the authorities, awaited the Russians as "liberators." However, these sources were written from the colonizer's point of view, and the role of the local elite was often exaggerated to justify the conquest or, conversely, presented in a diminished form [6].

Methodology

This research made comprehensive use of modern scholarly methods of historical science. The theoretical and methodological basis of the research consists of the principles of historicism, objectivity, and systematicity. On the basis of the principle of historicism, the process of the Russian Empire's conquest of the Kokand Khanate was studied in connection with the political and economic conditions of the second half of the 19th century. The principle of objectivity entails evaluating events by comparing various sources and viewpoints. In the course of the research, the comparative-historical method was used to compare the activity of the trade elite in the Kokand Khanate with that of local elites in other colonial territories of the Russian Empire. On the basis of the historical-analytical method, the economic interests of local merchants and large property owners, their ties with the Russian administration, and their mediating activity during the conquest were examined. In addition, using the prosopographic method, the general characteristics of the trade elite were determined through the example of the political and economic activity of certain large merchants and wealthy men [4].

Results

The results of the research showed that the process of the Russian Empire's conquest of the Kokand Khanate cannot be explained solely by military superiority or the internal political crisis of the khanate. A certain part of the local trade elite also played an important role in the success of the conquest. In particular, the economic ties that large merchants and wealthy men had previously established with Russia enabled them, during the conquest, to supply the imperial troops with necessary information, means of transport, and material resources. The analysis revealed that by the 1860s–1870s the intensification of political instability in the Kokand Khanate, frequently changing rulers, rising taxes, and internal conflicts had weakened the trade stratum's trust in the khanate's authority. As a result, some merchants came to regard cooperation with the Russian Empire as an effective means of protecting their own economic interests [10].

Analysis of the sources also shows that the Russian administration made active use of the local trade elite. In the conquered territories, it was precisely the representatives of this stratum who quickly adapted to the new administrative system and performed the function of

intermediaries in trade and financial relations. Along with gaining access to Russian markets, they also managed to preserve their economic position. The research likewise found that not all of the trade elite supported Russian policy. Some merchants and property owners were in favor of preserving the khanate's independence and materially supported actions against the conquest. For this reason, it is appropriate to assess the trade elite not as a single political force but as a social group with diverse interests. On the whole, the main hypothesis of the research was confirmed: namely, the fragmentation of the local trade elite and the cooperation of part of it with the Russian Empire accelerated the conquest of the Kokand Khanate and became one of the important factors in shaping the economic foundations of the subsequent colonial administration. This situation shows that Russia's success in Central Asia can be explained not only by military factors but also by a strategy of cooperation with local socio-economic forces.

Discussion

In the course of the discussion, it should be noted that the trade elite's cooperation with Russia cannot always rightly be assessed as political betrayal. Many merchants pursued a pragmatic policy in order to continue their activities, preserve their property, and adapt to the new conditions. This phenomenon is characteristic of many societies during the colonial period and reflects the tendency of local elites to reach an accommodation with the new authority. Nevertheless, the available sources demand that the issue be approached with caution. The majority of Russian administrative documents were written from the standpoint of imperial interests and may not fully reflect the real position of the local population and merchants. In local historical sources, by contrast, certain events are presented in an emotional or subjective manner. Therefore, comparative analysis of various sources is of great importance in studying this issue. The research also showed that although part of the trade elite went over to the Russian side, another part was opposed to the conquest. Hence, the local trade stratum should be assessed not as a group with a single political position but as a social stratum with diverse interests and views [6]. It is precisely this aspect that allows for a deeper understanding of the history of the conquest of the Kokand Khanate. On the whole, the results of the research show that the Russian Empire's success in conquering the Kokand Khanate can be explained not only by military force but also through the economic and political cooperation established with local social groups, especially part of the trade elite. This confirms the need to apply new scholarly approaches in studying the colonial history of Central Asia [1].

Conclusion

The conquest of the Kokand Khanate by the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th century is considered one of the important and complex political processes in the history of Central Asia. The results of the research showed that this process cannot be explained solely by Russia's military superiority or by the internal political weakness of the Kokand Khanate. Local socio-economic forces, in particular a certain part of the trade elite, also played an important role in the successful execution of the conquest. The research found that, as a result of political instability, economic difficulties, and internal conflicts in the Kokand Khanate, some merchants

and large property owners distanced themselves from the khanate's authority. In order to preserve and expand their economic interests, they chose the path of cooperation with the Russian Empire. As a result, this stratum assisted the Russian administration to a certain extent during the conquest through economic mediation, the exchange of information, and the explanation of local conditions.

Furthermore, in the period after the conquest, part of the trade elite successfully adapted to the new colonial administrative system, preserving and in some cases even strengthening its economic position. This circumstance was of great importance not only in establishing the political dominance of the Russian Empire in the region but also in shaping its economic foundations. However, it would be incorrect to conclude that all representatives of the trade elite supported Russian policy. The results of the research show that diverse interests and views existed within this stratum, and that certain groups took a position against the conquest. For this reason, the activity of the local elite should be assessed not one-sidedly but as a complex socio-political phenomenon. On the whole, the main hypothesis of the research was confirmed: the fragmentation of the local trade elite and the cooperation of part of it with the Russian Empire accelerated the process of the conquest of the Kokand Khanate and served to shape the economic mechanisms of colonial administration. The results of this research offer new approaches to the study of the history of the Kokand Khanate and create a scholarly basis for a deeper understanding of the colonial processes in Central Asia.

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