

# Матеріали конференції «ОСМАНСЬКА ІМПЕРІЯ, УКРАЇНА ТА КРИМ В СХІДНОЄВРОПЕЙСЬКІЙ ГЕОПОЛІТИЦІ»

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## **STRUGGLE FOR POWER IN DESHT-I QIPCHAG IN THE 15<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

Following the death of Genghis Khan, the Golden Horde, which took its place on the stage of history as one of the successors of the Mongol Empire, dominated most of Eastern Europe as of the middle of 13<sup>th</sup> century. Like the other successors of the Mongol Empire, which were founded in Turkestan, China and Iran, the ruling class of the Golden Horde was also composed of an aristocratic class that descended from the line of Genghis. This state, which was built on the Turkish-Mongolian state order and incorporated the local elements of the Desht-i Qipchaq area, converted to the religion of Islam during the reign of Berke Khan. The state, with the official conversion to this celestial religion, went through a remarkable alternation, especially with regard to its administrative and legal structures.

While, mostly, the ancient steppe traditions exclusive to Turks and Mongols were practised up until the mentioned date, now, the administrative style and organisation, which had already reached a certain stage in Islamic states, began to be implemented. It is quite possible to argue that the Arab-Persian procedures of rule, which were the distinctive signs of Islamic states, demonstrated a development to the disadvantage of the Turko-Mongols tradition, as a result of this change that came with the conversion to the new religion at issue. Nevertheless, the Golden Horde did not completely lose its nomadic characteristics, however, inevitably a dualistic structure emerged in its administrative organisation.

Nogai, who, after Berke Khan's death, acted as a real ruler for a long time even though he was not in the office of the khanate, became an absolute authority in the political life of the Golden Horde until the year 1299. Actually, according to Rukn al-Din Baibars, «Nogai assumed the role of ruler in the country for a long time. He kept the Berke family under his dominion, throned and dethroned khans that he chose as he wished!.

A while after Nogai's dictatorial regime and the period of puppet khans were finally over, Uzbek Khan (1313-1341) sat on the throne. From the beginning of his reign, he pursued a politics that was powerful and strict. In a short time, he outclassed his opponents and enemies. He accelerated the process of Islamization, which became a state policy in the time of Berke Khan. As a matter of fact, the following was written in a letter sent to the Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Nasir Muhammad in the time of Uzbek Khan: «There was only one non-Muslim community left in his country. When he became the khan, he forced them to choose between converting to the religion of Islam and war, and when they resisted, he defeated them by war, eradicated them by killing and capturing them»<sup>2</sup>. Aleksandr Yurevich Yakubovskii (1886-1953), the eminent scholar of the history of the Golden Horde, who deals with this historical record from a critical point of view, rightly evaluated as follows: «There is no doubt that this did not fit the real situation. Uzbek Khan took only the ruling classes into consideration, not the masses of people and nomads»<sup>3</sup>.

As for the issues of Eastern Europe and Russia, a politics based on effective and sound foundations could not be produced. Essentially, Uzbek Khan, who did not wish for the establishment of a unified and powerful Russian state, followed a balance politics between Russian principalities in accordance with his thought. He, especially, tried to maintain the balance between the Grand Duchy of Moscow and the Principality of Tver<sup>4</sup>. However, the positive results of the politics mentioned were not seen in the long term. Indeed, according to Charles J. Halperin, who evaluates this topic, the Golden Horde, despite being at the top its power during the reign of Uzbek Khan, the politics pursued regarding Moscow was far from being foresighted. Moreover, he did not manage to use the Russian principalities well<sup>5</sup>.

The main event that shook the foundations of the Golden Horde and diminished its power was the Toktamysh-Timur war. Because the turmoil that occurred in the field of Desht-i Qipchaq affected Turkistan directly, Timur Beg (1370-1405) sent Toktamysh, who had taken refuge under his protection, to his country and had him sit on the throne as the khan of the country, thus, putting an end to the turmoil. As Zeki Velidi Togan expressed in a unique way; «Instead of reinstating the fallen influence of the Golden Horde among its Eastern European Christian subjects, Toktamysh Khan (1379-1396) entered Azerbaijan with an immense army of ten divisions and destroyed Shenb-i Gazan by demolishing the cities of Tabriz and Maragha at the beginning of 1385»<sup>6</sup>. After this date, the Golden Horde, which had been subjected to the continuous impacts of Timur Beg for more than ten years, lost its political force and economic importance and lost its power of sanction to dissolve.

In the initial phase of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Golden Horde severely lost its dominance over its subject clans and there was a significant reduction that was observed in the income of the state. The population who were obliged to pay taxes did not know who would make the tax collection, due to the disappearance of political stability and internal conflicts. In particular, the areas of agriculture and production constantly changed hands, the struggle for power led to problems of security, and the people

gradually became poorer. Furthermore, the transit trade between Desht-i Qipchaq, Turkistan and China came to an end. On the other hand, the balance of forces in Central Russia changed in favour of the Grand Duchy of Moscow. Indeed, even though they spoke the same language, believed in the same religion and had the same traditions, the Russian people started to unify and become politically homogenous. Besides, Russians, who were under the rule of Turko-Tatar for many years, learnt their weaknesses as well. The Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom, which constituted another important wing of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Eastern European politics, showed an effort to spread against the Grand Duchy of Moscow. Thus, the decadence of the Golden Horde had slightly delayed<sup>7</sup>.

The Golden Horde, which was devastated in the course of Toktamysh-Timur war, as mentioned earlier, could not be saved by Edigü, the famous statesman who died in 1419 and was distinguished by his talents and intrigues, either. Indeed, as István Vásáry suggests appropriately: «Edigü, the talented non-Genghisid head of the Mangit tribe could only slow down but not halt the decentralising tendencies and economic decay of the empire. The century after 1419 witnessed the secession of the peripheral territories and their formation into new Tatar power centres»<sup>8</sup>.

Essentially, there were two main reasons for the internal conflicts, which flared up and heated gradually in the Golden Horde as from the second half of the 14th century, to reach the highest level. The first of these was the fact that «kara kişiler» (common people or ordinary people) struggled to pursue the khanate, and the second was the reaction showed by the «honourable khans» who were members of the Mongol aristocracy<sup>9</sup>.

By the midst of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the glorious days of majesty during the reign of Uzbek Khan had been finalised and the internal state of the Golden Horde was completely ruined. The political equilibrium of international state rasped away its claim of universality and, thus, was replaced by sectionalism. New local laws became more dominantly used instead of the «Yassa (Law) of Genghis Khan», which had the value of universal law in the successor states of the Mongol Empire. The mentioned change was not only seen in the political structure but also in the spiritual field. The clans that used to co-exist were now separated by values of belief and differences of language. When the formerly widespread westward trade winds from the east started to blow from the opposite direction, the Turko-Tatars khanates emerged<sup>10</sup>.

The destinies of these khanates, which came into existence in different parts of the divided Golden Horde, naturally ended in different manners. As khanates of Kazan, Astrakhan, and Siber, which had not been able to establish an intact order out of the decadence and robustness from their predecessors, were soon erased from the stage of history, the Khanate of Qasim, which occupied an interesting position in Eastern European and Russian history, had to recognise the high dominion of the Russians.

The Crimean Khanate, which was at the most advanced level in terms of power that it possessed among all the Turko-Tatar khanates,

could sustain its existence until the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to the intervention of the Ottoman Empire, which a great power of the time. However, the Crimean khans, at every attempt to restore the wreckage trying to revive the divided empire of the Golden Horde, were subject to the mercilessness of the Ottoman Empire, which did not want an alternative power to themselves at the northern steppes of the Black Sea. Nogai Horde, who could not rise to the authority of the khanate as he did not come from the line of Genghis, also played a decisive role in the relations of the Ottoman Empire-Crimean Khanate-Grand Duchy of Moscow, which was extraordinarily intricate and complicated.

At the present time, let's take a brief look at the phases of the establishment of the mentioned khanates, which were heirs to the Golden Horde and appeared towards the midst of 15<sup>th</sup> century. The city and people of Kazan, which, even today, are one the significant centres of civilisation of the Northern Turks, was established in 1437 and is a direct heir of the Khanate of Kazan. This khanate, which ascended on the old land of the Volga Bulgars, was one of the elites of the Golden Horde and was established by Ulugh Muhammad, who was distinguished by his attempts at seeking fortune and settling in in the region of Saray and Crimea. Despite the availability of reliable resources at our disposal, the history of the establishment of the Khanate of Kazan has been seriously disputed.

That is, when Ulugh Muhammad Khan, who lost his battle for dominance in Crimea, when he prevailed over the Grand Duchy of Moscow in the Battle of Belev, which took place on December 5, 1437, the foundation of the khanate was laid, and the Battle of Suzdal, which happened on July 7, 1445, reinforced the triumph of the Turko-Tatars. The scientific debate that began among the experts of the subject towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century has also been shaped around the two dates mentioned above. While some Russian scholars, mainly the Russian orientalist Vladimir Vladimirovich Veliaminov-Zernov (1830-1904), who was of Turko-Tatar origins, and his followers, accepted the date of 1445, many prominent scholars such as Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin (1776-1826), Zeki Velidi Togan (1890-1970) and Akdes Nimet Kurat (1903-1971) emphasized the year 1437. Jaroslaw Pelenski, who considered the establishment phase of the khanate as a process that started with the first war and ended with the second, rightly accepted the date of 1437 despite adopting a compromising attitude<sup>11</sup>.

On the one hand, the appearance of the Khanate of Kazan as a singular state on the stage of history is regarded as the formation of a new Turko-Tatar state, while, in other respects, it indicates that the Golden Horde, which was continuously bleeding, was absolutely divided. Of course, it was no coincidence that the Crimean Khanate was officially established in 1441, just four years after the appearance of the Khanate of Kazan, which was the first one of the successor states. The fact that Ulugh Muhammad Khan established an independent state whetted the appetite of the ambitious elites of the Golden Horde and the state, which had reached the end of its destined lifetime, divided into small pieces in a very short time.

Aleksandr Yurevich Yakubovskii, who analysed the fact that Kazan and Crimea, which were the two richest and most civilised regions of

Desht-i Qipchaq, acquired singularity and the actual decadence of the Golden Horde, based on objective criteria, accomplished to summarise the chaotic process and incidents that were experienced. According to him «The ruse that was being pulled by nomadic and semi-nomadic feudals, ulan (khanzadas), khans, and emirs ended with this incident. The establishment of the Kazan and Crimean khanates meant that the Golden Horde would take almost the form of a nomadic state»<sup>12</sup>.

A relentless struggle was seen among the nobles belonging to various branches of the Golden Horde in order to take hold of the port cities of Crimean Peninsula which was at the heart of Black Sea trade. As mentioned before, especially Ulugh Muhammad struggled to possess the Crimea region before establishing the Khanate of Kazan; sometimes he succeeded, yet, he could not achieve a lasting success in the final analysis. Therefore, when he could not obtain his first choice, Crimea, he withdrew to the Bulgarian territory and established the Khanate of Kazan.

The political conflicts and struggle for power that occurred in a time period between the years 1419-1436, which represented almost an age of fermentation on the eve of the Crimean Khanate's establishment, remained ambiguous until recent years. However, the documents belonging to the Genoese in Crimea, which was recorded between the years 1420-1428, have been decisive in the clarification of the mentioned dark and ambiguous period.

As a matter of fact, the reigns of the khans who temporarily ruled the Crimea in the mentioned period could not be determined chronologically. The proposals presented were complicated and wrong. While this was the case, Andrei Leonidovich Ponomarev, between the dates mentioned above, identified the periods of reign of the khans that ruled during this chaotic period, based on the accounting Books of the Treasury of the Genoese held in the city of Caffa and numismatic data<sup>13</sup>.

According to him, the list of the Crimean rulers between 1419 and 1436 was as follows: Bek Sufi (1419-1420 Spring), Ulugh Muhammad (1420 Spring), Bek Sufi (1429 Summer – September 1421), Interregnum (September 1421 – November 1422), Devlet Berdi (November 1422 – November 1423), Interregnum (November 1423 – 11 January 1424), Devlet Berdi (11 January 1424 – 12 June 1424), Ulugh Muhammad (12 June 1424 – 23 August 1424), Devlet Berdi (23 August 1424 – 14 May 1425), Ulugh Muhammad (14 May 1425 – ? February 1426), Interregnum (February 1426 – April 1426), Devlet Berdi (12 April 1426 – ? June 1427), Ulugh Muhammad (June-July 1427 – 1436)<sup>14</sup>. In the mentioned period, the coins made in the Crimean territory overlap with the information given by Genoese sources<sup>15</sup>.

While such an unstable and complicated process was experienced in Crimea, Hadji Giray, a member of the Genghis family, succeeded in establishing the Crimean Khanate by gaining dominance over the region. In fact, his grandfather Tash Timur and his father Giyas al-Din, too, had been struggling to dominate here<sup>16</sup>. It is known that the first Crimean Khan, mentioned above, was in contact with the Ottoman empire, which was rising rapidly, in order to gain control over the Black Sea. Since it was very easy for Crimea to establish relations with Anatolia and Istanbul via

sea, it is certain that there was a considerable amount of travel between the two sides. Indeed, when an Ottoman fleet came to the front of Caffa, which was retained by the Genoese, Hadji Giray Khan, too, besieged the mentioned castle from land. This shared besiegement was, of course, not the product of a coincidence, but a result of an agreement made between the Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman Empire<sup>17</sup>.

Therefore, shortly after the conquest of Istanbul, the Ottoman Empire began to intervene directly in Eastern European affairs. There is no doubt that the Genoese, which had trade colonies in the port cities of Crimea, were the most uncomfortable with this situation. As a matter of fact, when the Crimean Khanate recognised the high sovereignty of the Ottomans in 1475, the Italians could not operate in the Black Sea ports without the permission of the Sultan.

While these important developments were taking place in Kazan and Crimea, a new Turko-Tatar Khanate was founded in 1445 in the Riazan region, right by the side of the Grand Duchy of Moscow, by the son of Ulugh Muhammad, Qasim. This political organisation bearing the name of Khanate of Qasim in reference to its founder was an acquisition of the Battle of Suzdal when viewed from the perspective of Turko-Tatars. In fact, the khanate, which was established in order to keep the Grand Duchy of Moscow under pressure, would soon be completely under the rule of the Russians and serve the Russian expansionism. The reason why the Khanate of Qasim, which lasted until 1681, had a longer life compared to khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, was their recognition of Moscow's high sovereignty<sup>18</sup>.

The Khanate of Sibir, founded by Ibak Khan (1464-1495) in the Western Siberia, was also involved in the struggle for power in Desht-i Qipchaq. The significance of the mentioned khanate can be better understood if one takes the fact that some members of the Khanate of Sibir dwelled on the thrones of both the Khanate of Kazan and the Khanate of Qasim. The Khanate of Sibir, which was clearly distinguished from the rest of the successors of the Golden Horde by its internal structure, unique background and the region it was founded on, was also an area of contention between the Shaybanids and the Taibugids. The fact that the Khanate of Kazan and the Khanate of Astrakhan were occupied, in 1552 and 1556 respectively, would determine the destiny of the Khanate of Sibir, and soon bring about its elimination by the Russians, who were heading towards Turkestan with imperialist objectives<sup>19</sup>.

When the region of Desht-i Qipchaq was divided into khanates, the city of Saray, which was the capital of the Golden Horde, and its surroundings began to be called as the Great Horde. In 1502, in the place where this state was erased from the stage of history forever through the alliance of the Crimean Khanate and the Grand Duchy of Moscow, rose the Khanate of Astrakhan. This state, which was relatively less powerful than the khanates of Crimea and Kazan, could never maintain stability in its short lifetime and was conquered by the Russians immediately after the occupation of the Astrakhan region<sup>20</sup>. It is also necessary to cite the Nogais, which would increase gradually in the political and social affairs that took place in the

Desht-i Qipchaq from the second half of the 15th century, as one of the significant powers of this age<sup>21</sup>.

Consequently, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, political stability was lost in the Desht-i Qipchaq and the Golden Horde was disintegrated rapidly. It is possible to say that the nobles of the Genghis descendants were struggling for power and trying to form a new state on one side, while on the other, the Grand Duchy of Moscow and the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom were involved in political polarisation. There is no doubt that, while these were happening in the north, the Ottoman Empire, which was trying to take the Black Sea completely under its sovereignty after the conquest of Istanbul, was closely following the political developments in Desht-i Qipchaq. In fact, the Golden Horde's inclination to disintegration and the establishment of the Crimean Khanate benefited the Ottomans and made it easier for them to head north to dominate the Black Sea. The Ottoman Empire, which succeeded in taking advantage of the political turmoil that was experienced in the Desht-i Qipchaq, achieved some positive results in the initial phase but did not win remarkable successes in the long run. The political developments that were experienced subsequently proved that the most rational politics were adopted by the Grand Duchy of Moscow and that there were serious weaknesses and deficiencies in the Ottoman Empire's northern politics.

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## **TURLA BASIN AS NORTHERN ROUTE IN OTTOMAN GEOPOLITICAL SYSTEM**

### **Introduction**

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, transportation opportunities were very limited in the world. Since road construction vehicles, machines and modern transportation vehicles were not available at that time, transportation could usually be carried out on waterways and roads using rivers, seas, flat plains and mountain passes as far as geographical conditions allowed. Therefore, some navigable roads (major or minor) were of great importance both militarily and commercially in the medieval age and the new age.

A triple road system – the Right Arm (Crimean-Black Sea Trade Road), the Left Arm (Via Egnatia-Cânib- I Yesâr) and the Middle Arm (Via Militaris – Tarik-i Evsât) both in Anatolia and in Rumeli – is known to have been constructed by the Roman Empire and also used by the Byzantine Empire in the land before the reign of the Ottoman Empire<sup>1</sup>.