

THE ROLE OF CENTRAL ASIAN SCHOLARS IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL LIFE OF THE REGION

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Abstract: In the Middle Ages, the urban population — which constituted an important force in Central Asian society — did not participate in the system of state governance. Under such circumstances, scholars, relying on the support of the townspeople, emerged as a powerful political force within society. This article analyzes the role of scholars and, more broadly, representatives of intellectual life in Central Asian society.

Keywords: Central Asia, scholars, social life, political life, economic situation.

In the history of Central Asia, scholars played a significant role in many events that took place between the 9th and 15th centuries. The legal regulations developed by them, as well as their scientific debates, were based on the stable tendencies and realities of the development of Turkestan society, and on the vital interests of certain groups and strata of the population [1, p.4].

It should be emphasized that the study of the vast scientific heritage created by Central Asian scholars is still largely at the stage of identifying lists of their works, verifying authors, and preparing texts for publication — that is, at the heuristic research level. Without taking this immense intellectual legacy into account, attempts to reconstruct the general state of science, separated from the scholarly schools and environments of the region’s great thinkers, may lead to one-sided conclusions [1, p.7].

Abu Abdullah ibn Abu Hafs al-Bukhari, when Bukhara had been abandoned by the city’s troops in 874, went to Karmania and, acting as the main representative of the civilian population, negotiated the terms of surrendering the city to the Samanids [2, p.75]. This event took place at a time when the commander Rafi‘ ibn Harasama was with difficulty holding back the forces of Ya‘qub ibn Layth, who was advancing toward Bukhara [3, p.261]. As a result, on the first Friday of 874, instead of the name of Ya‘qub

ibn Layth al-Saffar (867–879), who until then had been mentioned as ruler, the name of Nasr ibn Ahmad Samanid (842–892) was included in the Friday sermon (khutbah) [1, p.111].

In the work *Kitab az-Zahā'ir wa-t-Tuhaf* (“The Book of Gifts and Rarities”), attributed to Qadi Abu al-Husayn Ahmad ibn az-Zubayr (written around 1070–1071), there is an account of the visit of a Chinese envoy to Bukhara in 939. The envoy was in fact a man who had previously been accused of a crime in Bukhara and had fled to China. His exposure at that time was significantly influenced by the jurist and chief state adviser of the amir, Abu Hafs Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Hafs ibn az-Zaburkon. Thus, we may say that he was the third prominent representative of the Abu Hafs family, which enjoyed considerable prestige and influence both in the state and in Bukhara’s society [1, p.115].

During the period of Abu Hafs al-Saghir, volunteer units led by jurists and organized groups of Bukhara’s townspeople played an important role in strengthening state and social authority. In the Samanid era, these groups were entrusted with auxiliary military functions. The increasing role of such detachments drawn from the city’s population in public life demonstrates how the personal authority of leading Hanafi jurists was gradually strengthened. Step by step, they came to occupy positions among the influential circles of the cities [1, p.117].

The accumulated tensions over the years between the urban population and the authorities inevitably led to conflict. It is said that Ibrahim Tamghach Khan did not introduce new taxes without prior agreement with the jurists. Clearly, for a certain time, the Qarakhanid ruler succeeded in maintaining good relations with the townspeople [1, p.119].

In 1137, Turkestan faced the threat of invasion from the Qara Khitay tribes — non-Muslim Mongolic groups. Their victory in 1141, at the Battle of Qatwan steppe, achieved in alliance with Muslim Turkic tribes, over Sultan Sanjar, altered the geopolitical situation of Turkestan. The Qara Khitay (also known as the Khitan or the Western Liao tribes) curtailed Seljuk influence, leaving the Qarakhanids in the role of local rulers. They did not interfere in the internal affairs of agriculture and were content with the tribute collected from the population.

In March 1209, in the Timcha-yi Khan madrasa in Bukhara (built by the Qarakhanids), Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Hasan at-Taj al-‘Iraqi, originally from Damavand, copied the *Kitab al-Hidaya*, most likely under the dictation of Shams al-

A'imma al-Qardari. Based on these details, it may be assumed that at the beginning of the 13th century, the Khwarazmshah sought to weaken the influence of the Sadrs of Bukhara by strengthening the position of the Qarakhanids, who ruled in Samarkand [1, p.164].

Patronage of scholars and students of religious sciences was one of the means by which the Sadrs enhanced their social prestige. For instance, a little-noticed detail mentioned by sources is that in the year when the Khwarazmshah conquered Bukhara, he reportedly supported six thousand jurists with his own funds. Perhaps it was precisely this capacity of the Sadrs — uniting within their ranks diverse groups of fuqaha who defended the interests of all layers of Bukhara's population — that constituted their strength and power [1, p.174].

Acting in this same direction, the Sadrs established a special library (*khizana al-kutub*) for scholars in the Sikkat ad-Dehqon neighborhood. This library is associated with the first three members of the Sadr dynasty: the father, Burhan al-Din al-Mozi; his son, as-Sadr ash-Shahid; and his brother, as-Sadr as-Sa'id (d. 1156), known as Taj al-Din Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz. In 1200, Imad al-Din Abu al-Mahamid Mahmud ibn Ahmad ibn Abu al-Hasan al-Faryabi (d. 1210) wrote his work *Kitab Khalisat al-Haqa'iq* for this library. At the same time, he made use of seventy-eight sources preserved in the "Library of Sadr Sudur al-'Alam and Burhan al-Milla wa-d-Din." This likely took place during the tenure of Sadr Umar ibn Mas'ud (d. 1207). The author of the book was a close associate of the Sadr family, for he was buried in their family cemetery in Bukhara (*Maqbara as-Sudur*) [4, p.28].

The first to encroach on the authority of the Sadrs in the city were the Khwarazmshahs. After their troops seized Bukhara, instead of the Sadr who was taken to Khwarazm, the Khorasani jurist Majd al-Din Mas'ud ibn Salih al-Farawi (killed around 1219) was appointed preacher [5, pp.63–64].

In 1238, during the uprising against the Mongols, its leader Mahmud Tarabi stripped the title of "Sadr" from the representative of the former Burhani family (the Burhanid dynasty) and transferred it to Shams al-Din Mahmud ibn Ahmad al-Mahbubi, the son of Ahmad ibn Ubaydullah ibn Ibrahim al-Mahbubi (d. 1233), the founder of a new group. In this way, the Sadr dynasty of Bukhara came to an end. Nothing is known about their subsequent fate [1, p.175].

The rulings of highly esteemed jurists had enormous influence among the people. During the reign of Nasr ibn Ibrahim Tamghach Khan (1068–1080), a Friday mosque

was built in the village of Iskijkat near Bukhara at the expense of a wealthy man. However, because Bukhara's jurists had issued a fatwa that small villages should not have Friday mosques, people ceased attending it, and it soon fell into ruin [2, p.28].

Conclusion

In the unstable conditions of Central Asia, scholars, relying on the support of the urban population, became a powerful force in society. They also served as mediators between rulers and the local population in resolving various socio-economic issues that troubled the people, thereby ensuring the relative stability of social conditions in Central Asia.

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