



A VALUABLE SOURCE FOR STUDYING THE HISTORY OF THE FERGANA VALLEY IN BAHR AL-ASRĀR FĪ MANĀQIB AL-AKHYĀR

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Abstract

This article discusses *Bahr al-asrār*, a valuable historical work by Mahmud ibn Vali that provides significant information about the Bukhara Khanate from the early 17th century up to the 1640s. The fact that the source has not yet been fully translated into any language and that its most valuable part exists in a single manuscript copy underscores the need to introduce the work more broadly into academic circulation. Furthermore, the detailed coverage of political developments in the Fergana Valley during this period further enhances the scholarly value of the text.

Keywords: Mahmud ibn Vali, *Bahr al-asrār*, Bukhara Khanate, Fergana Valley, Ashtarkhanids, Shaybanids.

Introduction

The period during which the Ashtarkhanid dynasty ruled the Bukhara Khanate holds a distinct significance in the history of Central Asia. Historical sources provide ample information regarding the khanate's political administration, socio-economic life, diplomatic relations, and cultural developments. At the same time, the early representatives of the dynasty – Jani Muhammad Khan (1599–1603), Baqi Muhammad Khan (1603–1605), Vali Muhammad Khan (1605–1611), and Imam Quli Khan (1611–1642) – are not as thoroughly documented. In many cases, the available data is either limited or inconsistent, making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the initial and developmental stages



of the dynasty's rule. For instance, such works as *Dastur al-Muluk*, *Tārīkh-i Muqīm Khān*, *Muhīt al-Tavārīkh*, *Ubaydullā-nāma*, *Tārīkh-i Abū al-Fayz Khān*, and *Matlab al-Ṭālibīn* were written in the second half of the seventeenth century, and as a result, tend to focus primarily on events from that later period.

Discussion

The early years of the century under investigation are relatively well documented in the works *Imomqulixonoma* and *Bahr al-Asrār*, the former of which is written in verse. An especially significant and rare source on the Ashtarkhanid dynasty is, without a doubt, *Bahr al-asrār fī manāqib al-akhyār* ("The Ocean of Secrets on the Virtues of the Noble"), written in 1640 by Mahmud ibn Vali. The author's father was originally from Koson and had relocated to Balkh during the reign of the Shaybanid ruler Pir Muhammad Khan (1546–1567) [1: 194, 2: 66, 3: 223, 4: 222]. Being born into a well-to-do and educated family had a positive influence on Mahmud ibn Vali's later intellectual development. His close acquaintance with the rich library of Sayyid Mirakshah Husayni played an essential role in his scholarly formation.

Between 1626 and 1631, he undertook an extended journey to India and Sri Lanka. Upon his return to Balkh in 1631, the scholar was warmly welcomed by Nadr Muhammad Khan, who appointed him librarian of the royal library. It was at this time that Mahmud ibn Vali began work on his encyclopedic seven-volume composition, *Bahr al-Asrār*, each volume divided into four sections. The author structured the work as follows:

Volume I – The creation of the world, and information related to geography and cosmography;

Volume II – The pre-Islamic era;

Volume III – The history of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him);

Volume IV – The history of the caliphs and imams;

Volume V – The Abbasid Caliphate and the histories of local dynasties under its rule;

Volume VI – The period from Chinggis Khan to Nadr Muhammad Khan;

Volume VII – The history from Amir Temur to the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan.



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Of this monumental work, only Volumes I and VI have survived to the present day. The most valuable section of the source is the fourth part of Volume VI, which documents events during the Ashtarkhanid period. This unique manuscript is currently preserved in the India Office Library in England under the catalogue number 575. The present article makes extensive use of this specific section.

Although *Bahr al-Asrār* has been known to the academic community since 1902, only selected portions have been published – some translated into Persian, and others into Russian [6, 7, 9]. Notably, the passage in the fourth part concerning the death of the Kazakh sultan Tursun Khan was translated into Russian by B. Akhmedov and published in the collection “*Materials on the History of Central Asia and Middle Asia from the 10th to the 19th Centuries*” [5: 247–249].

Moreover, the source contains numerous references related to the Fergana Valley. It provides valuable and previously undocumented information on events such as Keldi Muhammad Khan’s campaigns against Uratippa, Tashkent, and Samarkand in 1599 and 1602–1603, as well as on historical figures who later governed Andijan – such as Abul Muhammad Sultan, Abulay Sultan, Fozilkhoja, Pir Muhammad Khan, and Muhammadyor Sultan – and their involvement in political affairs. The account also offers a relatively detailed description of the movements in Andijan that opposed central authority.

These accounts of the above-mentioned individuals and events serve as a vital foundation for studying the political processes that unfolded in the Fergana Valley and its neighboring regions between 1599 and 1640. They also provide the basis for advancing a number of new scholarly conclusions.

The earliest events related to the Fergana Valley in the work are mentioned in the context of the conflict between Boqi Muhammad Khan and Keldi Muhammad Khan. Keldi Muhammad Khan was one of the last descendants of the Shaybanid ruler Suyunchkhoja Khan, although the chronicler expresses some doubt about his Shaybanid lineage. In the early period of Ashtarkhanid ascendancy, Keldi Muhammad Khan seized control of Andijan and began to pursue an independent political course. Boqi Muhammad Khan had entrusted the governance of Uratippa and Khujand to his nephew, Pir Muhammad Sultan. His initial attempt to capture Andijan ended in failure [8: 62a–62b].



Subsequently, Boqi Muhammad Khan personally launched a campaign against Keldi Muhammad Khan, who had by then taken control of much of Fergana, Tashkent, and Khujand, and had managed to forge an alliance with the Kazakhs. Recognizing the threat, Boqi Muhammad Khan mobilized a large army against him. However, in the initial battle at Shahrukhiyya, the Ashtarkhanid forces were defeated. Although Keldi Muhammad Khan's siege of Samarkand failed, he eventually died in Tashkent [8: 73a–73b]. His son, Khonzada, assumed control over the administration of the valley following his father's death. Boqi Muhammad Khan's efforts to strengthen central authority along the eastern frontier of the Bukhara Khanate ultimately culminated in a negotiated peace [8: 74a–75b].

During the reign of Vali Muhammad Khan, the Fergana Valley is scarcely mentioned in the source. This is largely due to the lack of active political engagement during his rule, which was primarily marked by internal struggles against his nephews Imomquli Khan and Nadr Muhammad Khan. However, following Imomquli Khan's accession to the throne, events surrounding Andijan and its environs begin to feature more prominently in the narrative. This is because Imomquli Khan sought to fully integrate Fergana into the khanate and thereby wage a more effective campaign against the Kazakh sultans of the Dashti Qipchaq.

As a result of the first military campaign into the valley, the ruler of Andijan, Khonzada, acknowledged Imomquli Khan as the supreme sovereign and declared his allegiance to him [8: 102, 103a–103b]. However, dissatisfaction with Khonzada's administration led the people of Andijan to send a petition to the Khan of Bukhara, requesting that the region be placed directly under his authority. In response, Imomquli Khan dispatched his brother, Nadr Muhammad Khan, along with the skilled military commander Yalangtush Ataliq, on a second expedition to the valley. Following these political developments, Khonzada once again recognized Imomquli Khan's authority, and a peace agreement was reached [8: 103b, 104a–104b, 105a–105b, 106a].

Shortly thereafter, following the year 1621, relations between Imomquli Khan and the ruler of Tashkent – the Kazakh khan Tursun Khan – deteriorated, culminating in a battle at Shahrukhiyya. According to the source, Abulay Sultan,



another Kazakh sultan who had come to aid the Khan of Bukhara, commanded the army from Andijan. This indicates that following Khonzada, governance of the valley passed into the hands of Abulay Sultan. However, his withdrawal from the Bukhara army just before the battle became a key factor in their heavy defeat [8: 106b, 107a–107b, 108a].

In 1624/1625, a major Kazakh offensive was launched against the Fergana Valley, led by Tursun Khan, Eshim Khan, and Murad Sultan. The chronicler explicitly notes that the Kazakh leaders were displeased with Abulay Sultan's defection to the Bukhara side. However, their campaigns – including battles near Karakhan, Chust, and the fortresses of Sang near Aksi – did not result in a decisive victory for the Kazakhs. As a result, they were forced to retreat back to Tashkent [8: 108b, 109a–109b].

Following the unsuccessful Kazakh campaign in the Fergana Valley, relations among the Kazakh sultans deteriorated. While Eshim Khan was away on a campaign against the Kalmyks, Tursun Khan launched an attack on his territories. This marked the collapse of the alliance between the two Kazakh khans and the beginning of a new phase of rivalry over the Kazakh Khanate. In the ensuing battle near Sayram, Tursun Khan was defeated and retreated toward Tashkent. At that time, Imomquli Khan's governors in Andijan, Khujand, Uratippa, and Jizzakh marched on Tashkent, occupying the regions of Shahrukhiyya and Piskent. Upon arriving in Tashkent, Tursun Khan was assassinated by his close associates. Subsequently, based on an agreement between Imomquli Khan and Eshim Khan, control over the regions of Tashkent and Turkestan was granted to the Kazakh khan [8: 110a–110b, 111a].

After Eshim Khan's death due to illness, the governor of Andijan, Abulay Sultan, seized control of Tashkent and had the Friday sermon read in his name. This provoked Imomquli Khan, who dispatched an army under the leadership of Yalangtushbiy Ataliq and Bobonazarbiy Durman. As a result of the ensuing battle, Abulay Sultan was defeated and fled toward Moghulistan. Thus, governance over both Tashkent and the Fergana Valley passed directly into the hands of the Khan of Bukhara. The region of Tashkent was granted to Boqi Muhammad Khan's son, Abdullah Sultan, while Andijan was given to Pir Muhammad Sultan [8: 111a–111b, 112a–112b].



In 1631, following the sudden death of Pir Muhammad Sultan and Imomquli Khan's renewed decision to punish the previously pardoned Abulay Sultan, another campaign was launched into the valley. Abulay Sultan was captured and sent to Bukhara, but he was killed en route [8: 113a–113b, 114a–114b, 115a–115b].

Imomquli Khan appointed his nephew Muhammadyor Sultan as the governor of Andijan. However, Muhammadyor Sultan, not wishing to govern a region he considered perilous, was replaced by Fozilxoja ibn Jonixoja. His governance was unpopular among some influential officials, who began efforts to bring the Xonzoda dynasty from Kashgar into power. As a result, a large-scale rebellion broke out in Andijan, which spread to the regions along the Syr Darya and the vicinity of Tashkent. This uprising, which occurred in 1635/1636, led to the deaths of Fozilxoja, the governor of Andijan, and Iskandar Sultan, the governor of Tashkent and Imomquli Khan's youngest son. In response, Imomquli Khan sought assistance from his brother, Nadr Muhammad Khan, to suppress the rebels. Nadr Muhammad Khan, leading a Balx army under Yalangtushbiy Ataliq, arrived in Bukhara. After fierce battles around Tashkent, the rebels and the Kazakhs retreated into the Steppe. Following small skirmishes in Sayram and the Talas Valley, the Kazakhs completely surrendered. The historian notes that, after Amir Temur and Abdullakhon II, Imomquli Khan was the ruler who campaigned in the direction of Dasht-i-Qipchaq.

Having dealt with the Kazakh issue, the Bukhara army moved toward Andijan, the center of the rebellion. Yalangtushbiy Ataliq captured Axs, where he engaged in brief, fruitless negotiations with the rebels. Imomquli Khan sent a large army under the command of his nephew, Khusrav Sultan, to assist Ataliq. After battles in Margilon, Axs, and Andijan, the rebels were defeated, and their leaders were severely punished. The region was once again incorporated into the Bukhara Khanate [8: 116a–123a].

CONCLUSION

Based on the information above, the following scientific conclusions can be drawn:



First, the majority of the information provided in "Bahr ul-asror" is valuable not only for the history of the Fergana Valley but also for the history of the Bukhara Khanate.

Second, the information in the source clarifies the **Ashtrakhanid** dynasty's lineage, the political activities of the Kazakh sultans, and the names of local rulers in the Fergana Valley.

Third, in most local sources written during the period of the Kokand Khanate, the rulers of the Ming dynasty ensured the legitimacy of their supreme power through the "Oltin Beshik" legend. Although it is said that this legend is far from the truth in academic circles, there is limited scientific evidence provided to dispute it. It is through the details in "Bahr ul-asror" that one can gain a broader understanding of the political life in the valley during the 17th century.

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