



ABU'L-KHAYRIDS

ABU'L-KHAYRIDS, the name used for the dynasty that ruled the khanate of Bukhara in 906-1007/1500-99. Until recently, this dynasty was incorrectly called in Western literature “Shaybanids” (or “Shibanids”). Its forefather was, in fact, Šīban, who was the fourth son of Joči, the eldest son of Čengiz Khan (d. 624/1227). However, the sixth generation of his descendants split into two branches: those of ‘Arabšāh b. Fulād and Ebrāhim-Oġlān b. Fulād. In the first quarter of the 15th century these two branches competed for the supreme authority over the nomads of the Central Asian Steppe (Dašt-e Qepčāq), who had become known under the name of Özbek. In 1429 a grandson of Ebrāhim-Oġlān named Abu'l-Ḳayr was elected in Siberia as the supreme ruler of the Özbek ulus, and he united under his authority the majority of the Özbeks. Yet, Abu'l-Ḳayr's ulus disintegrated after his death in 1468, and it was his grandson, Moḥammad Šāh-Baḳt (r. 906-16/1500-10), who became famous as Šībāni Khan from the pen-name Šībāni, which he used in his poetry; very often erroneously transcribed as Šaybāni), who reunited a part of the Özbeks and led them to the conquest of the Timurid territories.

The name “Šaybānids,” often used in scholarly literature for the dynasty founded by Šībāni Khan—besides the wrong transcription of it—can be misleading for several reasons. It cannot refer to the family of Šībāni Khan himself, because he left no posterity, and the authority in the Özbek state that he founded passed to other branches of this family. Besides, the name “Šībānids” should be applied to all the descendants of Šīban (son of Joči), in which case they should include both the branch of Ebrāhim-Oġlān (and later



Abu'l-Ḳayr) and the branch of 'Arabšāh. To distinguish between these two branches, which formed two separate dynasties in [Central Asia](#) in the 16th century, the branch of Abu'l-Ḳayr is to be called Abu'l-Khayrids and that of 'Arabšāh is to be referred to as Arabshahids.

The Abu'l-Khayrid empire emerged as a result of the Özbek conquests of the Timurid territories in Central Asia. After Šībāni Khan's conquest of Herat in 913/1507, he had his name read in the Friday sermon (*koṭba*) with the title Emām-al-zamān wa ḳalifat-al-raḥmān (the Leader of the Age and the Vicegerent of the Merciful), which was a claim to both spiritual and temporal supreme authority in the Muslim world (Boldyrev, p. 363; Semenov, 1954, p. 70; Subtelny, p. 133). This was a direct challenge to the Shi'ite dynasty of the Safavids, whose first shah, [Esmā'il I](#) (r. 907-930/1501-24), started at the same time his own conquests of the Timurid territories from the west. Since then the political and military conflicts between the Özbek dynasties in Central Asia and the Safavids and their successors in Persia always had a religious coloration.

By the time of Šībāni Khan's death in the battle with the Persians at Merv in 916/1510, the territories that he had conquered included Transoxania, [Fargāna](#), [Khwarazm](#), and a part of Khorasan. After the death of Šībāni Khan the sultans (members of the Abu'l-Khayrid clan), convened an assembly (*qoreltāy*), at which a new khan was elected. In accordance with the old Inner Asian nomadic tradition, the new khan was the eldest surviving member of the family, which was Kučkonji Moḥammad (an uncle of Šībāni Khan, r. 916-18/1510-12), also known as Kučum Khan. The territory remaining in the hands of the Özbeks was divided between the appanages of princes (sultans), members of the four branches of the Abu'l-Khayrid clan, the descendants of the four sons of Abu'l-Ḳayr Khan: Šāh Budāq (led by 'Obayd-Allāh Solṭān), who received Bukhara; Ḳvāja Moḥammad (led by Jāni-beg), who received Miānkāl (the region between Bukhara and Samarqand), to which they later added Balkh, captured from the Timurids in 932/1526; Kučkonji Moḥammad, who received Samarqand (at first jointly with the son of Šībāni Khan, Moḥammad Timur, who died in 920/1514); and Soyunjuk (or Sevinj Moḥammad), who received Tashkent (see the genealogical chart in McChesney, p. 179).

This system was unstable: it depended on the degree of the cohesion of the dynasty and the ability of its members to ensure the support of Özbek tribal chieftains (*amirs*), whose tribal militia was the main source of the military power. There was no permanent capital: the sultan who would be elected as a



khan would remain in the capital of his appanage which was his powerbase. The sultans remained independent rulers of their appanages, but until 957/1550 they maintained some cooperation with one another, especially in the wars with the Safavid Persia, their common enemy. The military leader of the Abu'l-Khayrids, after the *qoreltāy* of 916/1511, was not Kučkonji, but Šibāni Khan's nephew 'Obayd-Allāh Solṭān. Under his command the Özbeks defeated the ally of Esmā'il I, Timurid ruler and the future founder of the Mughal dynasty [Zahir-al-Din Bābor](#) (r. 1526-30), in a battle near Bukhara in 918/1512, and later in the same year they routed the Qezelbāš army at Gejdovān. 'Obayd-Allāh Solṭān retained his military leadership (and therefore was usually styled "khan") also later, and in 940/1533 he was elected the supreme khan on the basis of seniority and reigned until 946/1539. He invaded Khorasan five times in the 930s-40s/1520s-30s and sometimes occupied the entire province up to Astarābād and Semnān in the west, but the only decisive battle, near Jām in 934/1528, was won by the Safavids under Shah Ṭahmāsb I (r. 1524-76). After that the Özbeks had to retreat from Khorasan every time Ṭahmāsb I was coming with his army to liberate the province.

In 957/1550 a conflict erupted among the rulers of the appanages, and the wars between them continued, with some interruptions, until 989/1581 (see details in McChesney, pp. 181-82). By that time, the grandson of K^vāja Moḥammad b. Abu'l-Ḳayr, 'Abd-Allāh Solṭān, acting in the name of his father Eskandar b. Jāni-beg (r. 968-91/1561-83), who was the nominal ruler of the appanage of Bukhara and, since 968/1561, the supreme khan of the Özbeks, had eliminated in these wars all his rival appanage rulers, who were all killed or executed one by one, often with their entire families. After the death of his father in 991/1583, 'Abd-Allāh became khan (r. 991-1006/1583-98), and from that time on Bukhara became the capital of the newly emerging empire, which can rightly be called the Khanate of Bukhara. The appanages still remained, but now they were given to the members of 'Abd-Allāh's own family. During the decade and a half that followed, 'Abd-Allāh Khan expanded his empire in various directions, first to [Badakṣān](#), which he conquered in 992/1584 and annexed to the Balkh appanage held by his son 'Abd-al-Mo'men.

After that 'Abd-Allāh Khan began the conquest of Khorasan, taking advantage of the difficulties experienced at that time by the Safavids, both internally and in the war with the Ottomans. The Khorasan campaign began with the conquest of Herat in 996/1588. The chief role in this and all subsequent conquests in Khorasan belonged to 'Abd-Allāh's son and heir apparent 'Abd-al-



Mo'men, while 'Abd-Allāh Khan himself undertook the conquest of Khwarazm in 1002/1593 and 1004/1595-96 and briefly invaded Kāšgar and Yārkand in 1003/1594-95. The last years of 'Abd-Allāh's reign were marred by his conflict with his son, who claimed for much greater role in the affairs of the empire. Only the interference of the ulema prevented an open war between the father and the son, but the Qazaqs used the opportunity of this feud and invaded Transoxania in 1006/1598. 'Abd-Allāh Khan died in 1006/1598 at the very beginning of his campaign against the Qazaqs, and soon after this 'Abd-al-Mo'men was assassinated by a group of his father's *amirs*. The Abu'l-Khayrid dynasty in Bukhara was extinguished and replaced by a new dynasty of the Ashtarkhanids, or Janids, in 1007/1599.

The economy of Transoxania after the Özbek conquest, having improved originally after an important monetary reform under Šībāni Khan, later suffered from the conflicts and wars between the rulers of appanages, and the next reform (or series of reforms), gradually introduced under Kučkonji Khan by the end of the first quarter of the 16th century, had only a partial success (Davidovich, 1954; Idem, 1972). Great improvement in the economy took place, when the appanages were replaced by the empire of 'Abd-Allāh Khan, who took various measures that created more favorable conditions for both internal and international trade of the Abu'l-Khayrid khanate: improvement of roads and building of caravanserais, *rebāṭs*, and water cisterns. It was also under 'Abd-Allāh Khan that an English merchant, Anthony Jenkinson (1529-1610/11), acting as an agent of the Muscovy Company (founded in England for the trade with China) and, at the same time, as an ambassador of the Russian Tsar Ivan IV (r. 1530-84, known as Ivan the Terrible), traveled to Bukhara in 1558-59 and was received by the khan (Burton, pp. 12-14, 416-19).

The conquests of Šībāni Khan and the establishment of the Abu'l-Khayrid dynasty (as well as its Arabshahid rivals in Khwarazm) brought about important ethnic, political, and cultural changes in the life of Central Asia. They were accompanied by the migration of a substantial number of Turkic tribesmen to the southern regions of Central Asia and to Khorasan, thus boosting the nomadic Turkic-speaking population of these areas. The replacement of the Timurids with the Chingizid dynasty caused the revival, or re-invigoration, of the Turko-Mongol steppe political traditions, which was reflected not only in the above mentioned custom of the dynastic succession, but also in other matters of administration and court protocol. But in such spheres of the 'high culture' as literature and painting, the Timurid traditions

of the refined style and court patronage of poets and artists, with the literary gatherings (*majles*), more or less continued at the courts of various members of the Abu'l-Khayrid dynasty (Wāṣefi; Boldyrev; Schimmel; Subtelny; Semenov, 1956). The cultural continuity (at least a partial one) between the Timurids and the Abu'l-Khayrids especially owed to the emigration from Khorasan to Transoxania (but not to Khwarazm, which was not affected by this emigration) of many intellectuals—scholars, poets, writers, and artists, who refused to convert to the Shi'ism and fled religious persecutions by the Safavids. A prominent Persian poet from the Timurid Herat and later Samarqand, [Kamāl-al-Din Banā'i Haravi](#) (857-918/1453-1512), was among the first who switched sides and offered his service to Šībāni Khan (upon the latter's conquest of Samarqand in 906/1501), and he was the first who wrote, in Persian, the history of Šībāni Khan. This work was entitled *Šaybāni-nāma* in the first redaction, and *Fotuḥāt-e k̄āni* in the second, enlarged redaction (Storey-Bregel, II, pp. 1116-19). Another Persian poet from the Timurid Herat, Zayn-al-Din Wāṣefi, who fled, as a Sunnite, to Transoxania in 918/1512, was active at the courts of several Abu'l-Khayrids in Bukhara, Tashkent, and Samarqand, where he wrote his famous memoirs entitled *Badā'e' al-waqā'e'* (Storey-Bregel, II, pp. 1123-27).

Not only poets and writers, but also some outstanding miniature painters and calligraphers migrated to Transoxania, or were deported from Herat by the Abu'l-Khayrid conquerors in 941/1535. Among them was Maḥmud Moḍaḥheb, who became the leading miniaturist of the “Bukhara school,” which was founded under 'Obayd-Allāh Khan and continued the tradition of the Timurid school of Herat (Subtelny, p. 147). Of all the early Persian émigrés to Central Asia during the rule of the Abu'l-Khayrids the most influential one was, probably, Fażl-Allāh b. Ruzbehān Konji Eṣfahāni—a prominent Sunnite scholar and polemicist, and a former student of Jalāl-al-Din Davāni (Storey-Bregel, II, pp. 847-49; Haarmann, p. 342), who fled from Shah Esmā'il I first to Kāšān, then to Mašhad, then to Herat, and finally to Transoxania, where he found a warm welcome at the court of Šībāni Khan. He accompanied Šībāni Khan in his third campaign against the Qazaqs in winter 1509, during which, whenever the troops would stop for rest, Fażl-Allāh would discuss with the khan and his retainers various problems of Islamic law and theology (including some that were of immediate political concern for Šībāni Khan). This campaign and all the discussions in the khan's camp are described in Fażl-Allāh's *Mehmān-nāma-ye Bokārā* (Storey-Bregel, II, pp. 1121-22). Five years later, Fażl-Allāh b. Ruzbehān wrote for 'Obayd-Allāh Khan a treatise on



state administration in accordance with the religious law (*šari'a*).

Under the Abu'l-Khayrids, Persian continued to be the preferred language of literature, both prose and poetry (Bečka, pp. 494-504), as well as of historiography (Bregel, 2004, pp. 397-8), while Turkic began to be cultivated as literary language under the Arabshahids in Khwarazm. Even the first and the only history of Abu'l-Kayr Khan, the nomadic founder of the dynasty, was written in Persian for one of his grandsons. Altogether, the Abu'l-Khayrids, having retained much of their Turko-Mongol political traditions, successfully assimilated the Perso-Islamic culture of the countries that they conquered and ruled since the early 16th century, and Persia played a very important role in this process.

In modern scholarship, the history of the Abu'l-Khayrids received most attention in Soviet Russian literature, being mainly incorporated as special sections in the general survey volumes of the history of Uzbekistan or Tajikistan, but no monographic studies of the Abu'l-Khayrids were produced either in Soviet or post-Soviet time (for the primary written sources for the study of the Abu'l-Khayrid period see Storey-Bregel, II, pp. 1115-34; Akhmedov; Bregel, 1995, pp. 1003-9). The most important contributions to the study of the Abu'l-Khayrids were made by the numismatist-historian Elena Davidovich, whose publications related to this period cover a wide range of subjects of the political and economic history of the Abu'l-Khayrids (see Bregel, 1995, pp. 1654-55). In Western literature, the first monographic study of one important aspect of the Abu'l-Khayrid history—the “duel for Khorasan” (as it is called in the title) between Shah Ṭahmāsb I and 'Obayd-Allāh Khan in 1524-40—was done in Martin Dickson's unpublished dissertation whose content is much broader than its title (Dickson, 1958). The political history of the Abu'l-Khayrids, in particular of the politics of the appanages, is discussed in great detail in the article by Robert McChesney in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (see [CENTRAL ASIA vi. IN THE 10TH-12TH/16TH-18TH CENTURIES](#)). The political history of the Khanate of Bukhara under 'Abd-Allāh Khan II b. Eskandar (r. 1583-98) is surveyed in detail by Audrey Burton (pp. 8-98). Detailed historical maps of Central Asia during the time of the Abu'l-Khayrids are found in Bregel, 2003 (maps 26-28 and the accompanying texts).

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