

STROKES TO THE POLITICAL PORTRAIT OF AMIRLASHKAR ALIMKUL

(According to the materials of the "Turkestan collection")

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DOI: 10.47750/pnr.2022.13.S09.625

Abstract

The article provides sketches for the political portrait of Amirlashkar Alimkul, the regent during the reign of the Kokand Khan Sultan Said Khan. The outlines are based on the materials of Russian periodicals of the 60-70s of the 19th century, collected in the multi-volume "Turkestan Collection" – sources that have not yet been fully introduced into scientific circulation.

The author notes that the commander of the troops of the Kokand Khanate, Amirlashkar Alimkul, was an extraordinary and controversial person. This was reflected both in written sources and in scientific literature devoted to the history of the Khanate in general, the life and work of Amirlashkar Alimkul in particular. The materials contained in the pages of the periodicals of those years are compared with the data available in the official reports of Russian military commanders and local narrative sources.

Most of the written sources, including Russian periodicals, reflect the outstanding qualities of Amirlashkar Alimkul as a military leader and statesman who sought to preserve the independence and territorial integrity of the Kokand Khanate. At the same time, he, as a man of his time, could not rise above tribal thinking, which prevented him from becoming a generally recognized leader of the entire population of Fergana.

Keywords: Kokand Khanate, sources, periodicals, "Turkestan Collection", Alimkul, amirlashkar, regent, Chernyaev, Malla Khan, Sultan Sayyid Khan, article, report.

INTRODUCTION

The commander of the army (amirlashkar) Alimkul was a state and military figure who left a bright mark in the history of the Kokand Khanate. He is an extraordinary person. He, as a statesman, was characterized by such positive qualities as decisiveness, adherence to principles, purposefulness and patriotism. At the same time, being a man of his time, Alimkul as a politician was not free from a number of negative, from today's point of view, traits that were due to the socio-political reality of that era. Thus, having shown enviable determination in protecting the independence and territorial integrity of the state, waging an uncompromising struggle against the expansionist policy of the Russian Empire, he could not rise above the tribalist traditions deeply rooted in the state life of the Kokand Khanate. Therefore, in written sources and scientific literature there are conflicting assessments of the personality of Alimkul and his place in the history of the khanate.

Literature and methods

It should be noted that in Soviet times, historians of Uzbekistan and other Soviet republics were deprived of the opportunity to objectively study the life and work of this man. The official Soviet historiography was dominated by the concept of "the progressive significance of the annexation of Central Asia to Russia", which left no room for a positive assessment of the role

of Alimkul and other fighters for the independence of the Kokand Khanate. Therefore, in the literature of the Soviet period, a negative assessment of the personality of amirlashkar prevailed. Only after the collapse of the USSR and the “parade of sovereignties”, that is, the declaration of independence of the Central Asian republics, did political and ideological conditions develop for an objective understanding of the place of Alimkul in the history of the Kokand Khanate.

In the years of independence, the then young scientist Z.A.Ilkhamov was the first to study this problem. In his Ph.D. thesis [3] and a monograph [4] published later based on its materials, he, based on a wide range of local handwritten and Russian sources, archival documents, managed to recreate the life path of Alimkul and gave his own positive assessment of his role in the history of the Kokand Khanate. True, some historians disagreed with his conclusions [2: p. 35]. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that it is the work of Z.A.Ilkhamov that most fully reflects the political biography of Alimkul.

At the same time, we note that it was precisely with the light hand of Z.A.Ilkhamov that an incident associated with the name of Amirlashkar appeared in the historiography of the Kokand Khanate. In his monograph mentioned above, Z.A.Ilkhamov writes that on the basis of an independent study of the text of the handwritten list of the main source – the work of a close associate of Alimkul – Muhammad Yunus Taib’s “The History of Amirlashkar Alimkul” (source published in 1996 by Sh.Kh.Vakhidov, 1998 R.Shamsutdinov and P. Ravshanov in Tashkent and in 2009 T.K.Beysembiev in London; 6,11,12 in the list of references) he came to the conclusion that the name of amirlashkar should not be read “Alimkul”, but “Alikuli”. A well-known connoisseur of sources on the history of the Kokand Khanate Sh.Kh.Vakhidov [4, 25], who in a number of his subsequent publications began to call Amirlashkar “Alikuli”, agreed with his opinion. As a result, confusion arose in the scientific and educational literature, which continues to the present: some authors call the amirlashkar traditionally Alimkul, while others call it Alikuli in a new way.

In our opinion, amirlashkar went down in history under the name Alimkul long ago. Under this name, he is mentioned in almost all written sources, both local and Russian, moreover, many of them were born during his lifetime. Therefore, it seems to us that there is no need to rename this statesman, even if in fact his real name was “Alikuli”. For the simple reason that he has already gone down in history under the name of Alimkul.

Sh.Makhmudov did not agree with this opinion, expressed in one of our publications, believing that it was based only on Russian sources, although we clearly noted that the name “Alimkul” is found both in Russian and local sources. The positive thing in the publication of Sh.Makhmudov was that he gave another argument: in the seal belonging to the amirlashkar, affixed to his letters to the Turkish sultan, the name of its owner is listed as “Alikuli” [14: p. 4]. We do not question this fact. And we are not going to put an end to this issue. Nevertheless, we believe that retroactively renaming this well-known personality still should not be. After all, no one suggests calling the famous leader of the uprising in the Kokand Khanate, who went down in history as “Pulat Khan” (more precisely, False Pulatkhan), by his real name “Mulla Iskhak”?!

Z.A.Ilkhamov and other scientists involved in the study of the life and work of amirlashkar Alimkul almost the entire array of historical sources. At the same time, we drew attention to the fact that the materials of the Russian periodical press of the 60-70s of the XIX century, concentrated in the multi-volume “Turkestan Collection”, remained out of their field of vision, although the critical use of these sources is very useful for clarifying many details of the biography of amirlashkar.

In preparing the article, we used such research methods as historicism, problem-chronological and problem-territorial approaches, factual method, comparative analysis.

Analysis and results

The “Turkestan Collection” contains materials relating to the time of Alimkul’s regency, as well as his direct participation in hostilities against the colonialists. There are also articles containing an assessment of the role of amirlashkar in the history of the khanate.

Volume 152 of the “Collection” contains the correspondence “From Kokan, September 21”, taken from the 294th issue of the newspaper “Voice” for 1875. An unknown author, touching upon the issue of the time when the amirlashkar came to power, writes: “In the khanate of Molla Khan, the Kipchak Alimkul was the all-powerful regent” [10, 114]. So, the author claims that Alimkul single-handedly began to rule the khanate immediately after Malla Khan came to power. However, another source from the “Turkestan Collection” denies this thesis. So, in the article by A.Kun “Some information about the Fergana Valley”

("Military collection", No. 4 for 1876), it is emphasized that Malla Khan was "a completely independent monarch" [8, 154]. This idea is also confirmed by local sources, who report that Malla Khan was a completely independent ruler, and not a figurehead. So, the author of "Ansab as-salatin va tavarikh ul-khavakin" Mirza Alim Mushrif Toshkandi writes that Malla Khan, after ascending the throne, "became such a hot-tempered and formidable khan that for an insignificant deed he ordered the guilty to be stripped naked and punished with seventy-five blows stick. He scared the people. Sipahis and patrials were constantly in great fear and apprehension" [5, 153]. It follows from this that the omnipotence of Alimkul in the Kokand Khanate did not come during the reign of Malla Khan, although it was he who appointed him to this position, but after the death of the monarch, with the accession to the throne of his son Sultan Sayyid Khan. It was thanks to the efforts of Alimkul that the minor Sultan Sayyid Khan ascended the throne [4: p. 49]. As a result, the newly minted khan was actually a figurehead, and all power was concentrated in the hands of Alimkul.

On the pages of the "Turkestan Collection" Alimkul appears as a leader who led "the most warlike of the Turkic tribes" on the eastern outskirts of Central Asia - the Kipchaks and Kara-Kyrgyz. The above-mentioned issue of the "Golos" newspaper says: "The Kipchaks, with their leader Alimkul, ... clashed with the Russians in the early years of the occupation of the cities of the Turkestan region: Aulie-Ata, Chimkent and Turkestan" [10: p. 110].

The 58th volume of the "Turkestan Collection" contains reports of Russian military leaders on military operations on the Russian-Kokand front. In a number of them one can find valuable information that sheds light on some aspects of the activities of the amirlashkar.

From the report of General Chernyaev dated August 8, 1864, it becomes clear that after the occupation of the cities of Aulie-Ata and Turkestan by the Russians, the regent Mulla Alimkul took diplomatic steps towards a peaceful settlement of the Russian-Kokand military confrontation and the return of these cities. With such a mission, on July 16, 1864, his envoy arrived in the camp of General Chernyaev. However, the ambassador was told that the general was not authorized to conclude a peace treaty, but that he had the right to suspend hostilities, provided that ambassadors were sent from the khan to Petersburg with the authority to conclude peace on the terms that would be proposed by the Russian government.

With this proposal, Master Severtsov, who was with General Chernyaev for scientific research, was sent to the Alimkul camp. In a conversation with him, Alimkul again raised the issue of the return of the cities of Aulie-Ata and Turkestan. Severtsov made it clear to the amirlashkar that this issue was not subject to discussion. Therefore, he noted, there is no need to touch upon it in a response letter addressed to General Chernyaev. Despite this warning, Mulla Alimkul again sent an ambassador to Chernyaev with a letter in which, among other things, he asked the general to notify him whether he himself could return the cities of Aulie-Ata and Turkestan, or whether the decision of the government should be awaited. After reviewing the contents of the second letter, an angry Chernyaev left him unanswered, and ordered the ambassador to be escorted out of the camp.

The next day, another ambassador arrived at the general and, on behalf of Alimkul, agreed to send an embassy to St. Petersburg. In response, Chernyaev stated that this was possible only if a number of conditions were met, namely: the embassy must have a letter from the khan to conclude peace on any conditions that would be offered to him; the khan must release all the Kyrgyz (Kazakh - R.A.) sultans and biys, whom, apparently, the amirlashkar held as hostages, and disband the army gathered near Chimkent, etc. Naturally, Alimkul could not accept these conditions. After that, the negotiations were terminated [7: p. 66-67].

After the fall of Aulie-Ata and Turkestan, the fortress city of Chimkent became the main stronghold of the Kokand Khanate in the south of modern Kazakhstan. Alimkul made great efforts to strengthen this fortress. However, the short-sighted policy of the Bukhara emir Muzaffar, who undertook a campaign against Kokand at that time, forced the amirlashkar to return with the main forces to Fergana. This was used by the Russian troops, who, under the command of Chernyaev, captured Chimkent in September 1864. And in early October, the enemy made the first attempt to take the city of Tashkent, but having failed, he was forced to retreat.

At this time, amirlashkar Alimkul, who defended Ferghana from the invasion of the Emir of Bukhara, returned to Tashkent and on December 4 began a campaign against Turkestan. On December 5, not far from the village of Ikan, the soldiers of Alimkul surrounded the Cossack hundred under the command of Yesaul Serov, whom the amirlashkar offered to surrender and accept the "Mohammedan faith." The Russians did not accept his proposal, and, suffering huge losses, retreated to Turkestan with a fight. In this battle, Vasily Ryazanov knocked out a white horse under Alimkul [7: p. 83-84]. The people of Kokand came close to the walls of the city, but they could not take it.

In the reports of Russian military leaders, the name of Alimkul amirlashkar is also mentioned in connection with military operations for the capture of the city of Tashkent. So, on the eve of the second campaign against Tashkent, in a report dated May 2, 1865, General Chernyaev sent a message to the authorities about the mood of the city residents. He writes that “in Tashkent itself the general mood is far from being in favor of the Kokan government”, that the inhabitants of the city have long been weary of “the despotic rule of the regent of the Khanate Alimkul...” [7: p. 84]. Noting that a certain part of the townspeople was pro-Russian, Chernyaev wrote in another report dated May 11 of the same year that, by agreement with the residents, as the Russians approached the walls of the city, the townspeople had to rush to the Kokand garrison and open the gates of the city to them. But, the report says further, “on the same day (May 8 – R.A.) Mulla Alimkul arrived in Tashkent from Kokan with an army of up to 6,000 people, with 40 guns and, of course, by his presence suppressed any possibility of any traffic in the city” [7: p. 86]. The further course of events showed that General Chernyaev overestimated the strength and capabilities of the Tashkent collaborators, which will be discussed below.

In the "Turkestan collection" the last battle near Tashkent, in which amirlashkar Alimkul took part, is described in sufficient detail. On May 9, 1865, at 6 o'clock in the morning, Alimkul with his army launched an attack on the position of General Chernyaev. At 7 o'clock, the Kokandians opened a cannonade on the camp from 12 gun batteries. Their shooting, according to Chernyaev himself, “despite the long distance (800 sazhen; sazhen is a Russian measure of length equal to 2,13 metres – R.A.), was remarkably successful: all the shells fell on the camp, but, fortunately, they did no harm” [7: p. 87].

Chernyaev decided to go on a counterattack. To meet the enemy, he sent four companies of infantry with a battery division under the command of Captain Borislavsky. Approaching 40 sazhen, the Russian artillery opened fire on the batteries of the Kokandians and their nearby columns, and two companies sent to the right began to bypass their left flank.

The Kokandians directed fire at the Borislavsky detachment, but the Russian artillery, "acting very accurately", pushed their columns away and somewhat weakened the enemy's artillery fire. Taking advantage of this, two companies from the Borislavsky detachment were ordered to move forward and, under cover of artillery, attack the enemy simultaneously with two companies sent around. As soon as the companies began to rise to the hill, the Kokandians opened frequent and strong firing at them from all guns. The Russian infantry, under heavy enemy fire, ran up to the heights. The warriors of Alimkul could not withstand this onslaught and began to retreat. The cavalry rode away, and part of the infantry was overtaken and lay down on the spot [7: p. 87]. In this battle, Alimkul himself was seriously wounded, and soon died.

Chernyaev believed that the death of Alimkul would lead to an increase in pro-Russian sentiment in Tashkent and the city would be taken without much effort. But this did not happen: the people of Tashkent turned to the Emir of Bukhara Muzaffar with a request to help them and take the city under their citizenship [7: p. 88]. Although the emir did not provide the expected assistance, the very fact of turning to him, as well as the desperate resistance of the townspeople after the enemy entered the city, once again confirms that the number of pro-Russian citizens among the residents of Tashkent was small.

It is noteworthy that during the siege of Tashkent in the village of Zangi-Ata, the Russians met a Khiva diplomat sent to Mulla Alimkul. The source does not say anything about the purpose of this mission. General Chernyaev, apparently not wanting to aggravate relations with the Khan of Khiva, sent the ambassador back with gifts through Fort Perovsky to Khiva [7: p. 88].

Let us now consider the question of what assessment was given in the Russian periodical press of the 60-70s of the 19th century to personality of amirlashkar Alimkul.

The pages of Russian newspapers and magazines pay tribute to Alimkul's personal qualities and his courage. In a number of articles, the authors call him a brave warrior and commander. In many publications, the name of amirlashkar is mentioned with the obligatory prefix "mullah", which is evidence of the recognition of his knowledge in the field of theology.

However, in general, in the Russian periodical press of those years, a negative assessment of Alimkul as a person and statesman prevails, which we already had to write about in one of our publications [1: p. 158-163]. So, in the article “Incidents in the Kokan Khanate”, published in the 245th issue of the “*Birzhevye Vedomosti*” for 1875, its author, a certain P.M., speaking of the coming to power of Malla Khan's son, Sultan Sayyid Khan, writes : “The time has come for Alimkul to be the sovereign ruler of the entire Kokan. Sultan-Seid was only a mask behind which this cruel temporary worker was hiding. By executions, he soon brought the people to complete submission to himself, but later he armed them with his cruelties so much that, when they took Tashkent, they say, he was killed by his own Sarts” [9: p. 54-C].

The assumption of the author of the article about the death of Alimkul amirlashkar, allegedly killed by "his own Sarts", was intended to strengthen the negative perception of his personality by readers. But this version is based on speculation ("they say"), and is not confirmed by either local or Russian sources.

A negative assessment of Alimkul's personality in the Russian periodical press is a completely natural phenomenon, because as a political figure who consistently opposed the expansionist policy of the Russian Empire, as a patriot who sought to preserve an independent Muslim state – the Kokand Khanate, he could not enjoy sympathy in Russian political and journalistic circles. Local authors had a completely different opinion. Thus, the author of the work "A book about the military operations of Alimkul and life in a foreign land" ("Alimqul jangnomasi va gharibnoma") Mulla Halbek Andijani, a contemporary of amirlashkar, who personally took part in the hostilities against the Russian troops, highly appreciates the deeds of Alimkul, noting that at that time in Turkestan "there was no hero and patriot like him" [13: p. 113, 114].

Conclusion

Amirlashkar Alimkul from 1858 to 1865 led the struggle of the population of the Kokand Khanate for independence against the Russian Empire and the Bukhara Khanate. His military talent and ability to manage state affairs were especially pronounced during the years of the regency (1862-1865). Alimkul undertook energetic measures to strengthen the country's defense capability and strengthen the army. However, he failed to free himself from the tribalist way of thinking. In his policy, he relied mainly on the Kipchak and Kyrgyz nobility, ignoring the interests of the settled agricultural population and the elite, which deprived him of the opportunity to become a national leader. Despite some of his political mistakes and personal shortcomings, Alimkul amirlashkar went down in history forever as a politician who fought for the freedom and independence of his homeland until the last days of his life.

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