

The Innovations of Abylay-khan

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Abstract. This article covers the biography and innovations of Khan Abylay - an eminent military man and state leader of Kazakhstan in the 18th century. The authors collected and analyzed information about the activity of this Kazakh ruler in many different sources. The most notable of his actions were the development of agriculture and Kazakh's settled life. Besides, he built fortifications and restored the cities of South Kazakhstan as political, economic and military strategic centres of the country. Abylay created a guard of Tulenguts that was subordinated directly to khan. It may be considered a germ of regular army and forced punitive machinery of the country. The innovations of Abylay-khan consolidated the statehood of the Kazakhs and promoted the socio-economic development of the Kazakh society. Moreover, they predetermined the development of more progressive forms of economy – agriculture, trade and handicraft. The revealed innovations show that Abylay managed to find with perspicacity and pragmatics the priority vector for further socio-cultural evolution in Kazakh society according to the challenge of history.

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Introduction

Abylay (1710-1780) was one of the legendary rulers in the history of Kazakhstan [1]. He was an outstanding person and lived in the epoch when the Jungarian khanate displayed aggression [2], China was ruled by the Qing dynasty and Russia moved deep into Central Asia [3]. Hard fate in the years of youth and maturity improved his personal gifts and strengthened his will for victory. Abylay could die in youth when he became an orphan. He could be executed in Jungarian captivity or die of wounds obtained in battles. Luck helped Abylay and the Kazakhs called him “an embodied spirit (arvakh) sent for great achievements” [4].

Main part

Abylay was a brave and determined man. In advanced age, he not only arranged military campaigns but also directly took part in battles. Messages about his wounds obtained in fighting testify to this fact. Thus in 1756, during the battle with invaded Qing troops “the sultan was wounded in the thigh with a spear so tightly that he stayed very sick and could not walk for a long time” [5]. In 1765 during the battle with the Quqons, Abylay “could be killed but was only seriously injured thanks to his chain armour and undercoat” [6].

Abylay's moral qualities can be illustrated by his refusal to become the Khan of the Middle Zhuzh when Abulmambet was alive. This suggestion

was made by Russian authorities in 1760. According to the report of Russian emissaries, Abylay said: “This is a serious question. So it cannot be decided soon. I, Abylay-sultan, without the consent of Abulmambet-khan, whom I consider my father, cannot grant your request”. After the return from the sultan's headquarters, the representatives of Russian authorities concluded that Abylay “does not incline” to be made a khan by the tsarist government [7]. His principles of justice are proved by the following fragment of a letter sent by Abylay to Catherine the Great: “Your Padishah Majesty should treat equally all of us – the Russians, the Kazakhs and other nations. The commandants of your frontier fortresses displayed fairness, and there should not be violence and oppression” [8].

In addition to his military mastery, outstanding diplomatic abilities and organizational talent, Abylay had an extraordinary intelligence. Abylay was the only one who managed to learn the Oirat language among sultans and other Kazakhs who were in Jungarian captivity. According to some sources, Abylay knew some other oriental languages. Thus Abylay's clerk M. Mametov noted while describing the reception in the Manchu Embassy: “The envoy read for Abylay translating from Chinese into Kalmyk which Abylay-sultan knew”. Another source reports: “Abylay-sultan and Yulbars-sultan interpreted a letter in the Kalmyk and Persian languages and recounted to the Kyrgyz” [9]. Captain

I.O. Brekhov noted: “Abylay himself knew how to read, speak and write Chinese quite well” [10].

Abylay understood better than many representatives of the Kazakh elite the situation and tasks of the Kazakh people in the epoch of firearms when the nomadic world could no longer resist the sedentary one. Folk legends say that the young sultan Abylay, when waiting for execution in Jungarian captivity, admitted that he wanted to see the Kazakhs settled: “The Kazakhs are nomadic people, not settled. If we consolidate them in one place, give them land and teach them to live a settled life, then it won't be a pity to die”.

It should be especially noted the measures taken by Abylay for the development of agriculture and settlement of the Kazakhs. In October 1763, the sultan reported in letters to various representatives of Russian authorities that he had an intention to “acquire” a ploughed field “near the river Kolchakla”. He asked Russian government to send “10 Russian people with tools for teaching the Kyrgyz how to till the soil” and “first of all two ploughmen because he already had two Kyrgyz who knew tillage a little”. It follows from the document of the meeting with Bashkir foremen in 1764 in the Middle Zhuzh that Abylay stayed near Kokshetau waiting for Russian specialists. They did not come and he used his people for tillage: “This year, Abylay-sultan sowed even millet”. In 1762-1763 he tried to arrange a centre of agriculture in the valley of river Ili. In 1780, M. Bekchurin reported that Abylay-khan settled “six days of ride from city Tashkeniya and tills the soil in that place” [11].

There are good grounds for thinking that Abylay was an initiator and organizer of Kazakh agriculture in the second half of the 18th century in northern and southern Kazakhstan. A number of people from the top Kazakh elite followed his example and promoted the distribution of tillage in steppe land. In the late 18th century, the agricultural areas in Kazakhstan broadened considerably. In eastern Kazakhstan, agriculture developed on the slopes of the Tarbagatay and Kalbin mountain ridges, in the foothills of the Karkaraly. It spread in the south (the valleys of Syr Darya, Arys and Karatau) and in the north (Ishim, Nura and Torgay with their tributaries).

Another innovation of Abylay in cattle breeding was selection and preservation of the best horse breeds: “When wise Abylay, Kenesary's grandfather, conceived a campaign against wild Kyrgyz, he gave an order that every 10 tents provide him one horse or mare of the breed “argymak”. The order of the formidable khan was executed: they formed an entire herd which was called “a gem of the

khanate”. This herd was kept under the strictest supervision” [12].

After a long war with the Jungars and the Qing Empire, Abylay made every effort to establish diplomatic and trade relations with Russia and China [13; 14].

Abylay restored the institutions for political control and oppression destroyed by the Jungar invasion. He understood the significance of cities as political, economic and military centers of the country. The Khan arranged a series of successful military campaigns against Kokand, returned Tashkent and other cities of the Middle Syr Darya under the rule of the Kazakhs. Abylay restored several city centers in southern Kazakhstan and erected new fortifications. The city of Suzak was heavily damaged and devastated by the Jungar. According to akyn Shadi Tore Zhangiruly, Abylay resettled a part of sedentary population into the devastated city from other regions of southern Kazakhstan in order to revive Suzak [15; 16]. Another city built over again was Itneent (most likely Zhetikent). Its restoration is connected with Abylay according to a document issued in 1781: “His other children – Adil', Urustyam and Tok stayed in this part of the city Turkestant, in a newly one built by Abylay, not in that distant city Itneent”. In Semirechye, there was a fortified place erected by Abylay-khan “a house near the river Talash for his son Adil'-sultan on request of obeyed Kyrgyz-Cossacks from the Great Horde, enclosed it with a rampart and established near it a village of the Kara-Kalpaks who got accustomed to tillage” [17].

Besides, innovations were made in the solemn ceremony of senior khan's election. Thus, along with khans, sultans, biys and other influential figures of three zhuzhes, the townsmen of southern Kazakhstan were for the first time took part in elections: “In 1771, the Khan got through three the best hordes khans, sultans, foremen, the Kyrgyz, and also the Tashkents and the Turkestants with common agreement in order to become the main khan above all khans in the city of Turkestant near the coffin of the Saint Khoja Ahmed. A prayer was said according to the tradition and their custom. So he became a khan and was lifted on a white felt mat before the whole gathering” [18].

Innovations for the consolidation of state power stand apart. Abylay created a guard of Tulenguts directly subordinated to the Khan. This independent combat unit consisted of several thousand people. The Tulenguts can be considered a germ of regular army and forced punitive machinery of the country.

Abylay strengthened the supreme power. This influenced people's well-being: “During his life,

ancient strict laws were kept with accuracy: the smallest crimes caused an inevitable penalty for criminals. At that date, cattle raids did not exist among the Kyrgyz yet. The poorest of them had not less than 500 head of many different animals. Rich people had 5-15 thousands head" [19].

Conclusion

The innovations made by Abylay-khan consolidated the statehood of the Kazakhs, promoted the socio-economic development of the Kazakh society and predetermined the development of more progressive forms of economy – agriculture, trade and handicraft.

The great respect for Abylay is proved by the fact that he was buried at the place of honour – near the threshold of Kabyrkhana in Turkestan dervish lodge where Ahmed Yasavi is buried. This fact has archeological and anthropological evidences [20; 21]. None of the leaders of Central Asia was awarded such an honour.

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