

The History of The Ashtarkhanid Dynasty (Based on The Work Tarixi Salimiy)

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Abstract: This article is dedicated to a scholarly analysis of the political, military, and cultural activities of the rulers of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty in the history of Mawarannahr and the Bukhara Khanate, based on Mirza Salimbek's historical work *Tarikh-i Salimiy*. The study examines the internal power struggles among members of the dynasty, succession conflicts, responses to external threats—particularly relations with the Iranian ruler Nadir Shah—as well as diplomatic efforts and statecraft. The article explores the role of Ashtarkhanid rulers in governance, their attempts at establishing centralized authority, their interactions with military elites and amirs, and the eventual decline of the dynasty, which paved the way for the rise of the Manghit state. Events described in *Tarikh-i Salimiy* are critically analyzed through the lens of modern historiography to assess their significance in the political history of Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Ashtarkhanid dynasty, Mawarannahr, political history, internal conflicts, state governance, Nadir Shah, *Tarikh-i Salimiy*, Bukhara Khanate, amirs, dynastic transition.

Introduction: Mirza Salimbek ibn Muhammad Rahim (1848–1930) was a historian, poet, statesman, and diplomat who lived during the Bukhara Emirate and the Bukhara People's Republic. He served as governor of several districts and provinces within the Emirate of Bukhara, carried out diplomatic missions on behalf of the emirs, and participated in negotiations with the British. After the Red Army's Bukhara operation in 1920, he was arrested, but released a year later. He then worked as an administrator under the Bukhara People's Soviet Republic, participated in historical research, and managed the library of ancient manuscripts. In his memoirs, Mirza Salimbek describes the history of the Bukhara Emirate, the conditions in its provinces, the historical geography of various regions, and the activities of the Jadids in the Emirate of Bukhara.

METHODS

Mirza Salimbek's work *Tarixi Salimiy* covers the history of Central Asia from the era of Chinggis Khan to the reign of Amir Olimkhan. The work also sheds light on the period of political instability in the late 16th and early 17th centuries in Transoxiana and its neighboring

regions, during which the central authority weakened as a result of the decline of the Shaybanid dynasty. It was during this time that the Ashtarkhanid dynasty emerged on the historical scene and sought to establish a new political order in the region. The death of the Shaybanid Abdulmomin Khan led to a political vacuum and disorder in Transoxiana, prompting invasions by external forces, particularly Kazakh tribes. The conquest of Samarkand by Tawakkal Sultan is a vivid example of this chaos. The inability of local rulers such as Eshimbiy and Eshimkhan to resist these developments reflected the military and political weakness of the state.

As no heir remained from the Shaybanid lineage during this period, the arrival of Yormuhammad and his son Janibek Khan in Bukhara—aligned with the needs of the historical moment—paved the way for the Ashtarkhanid dynasty's entry into the political arena. The warm reception extended to them by Iskandarkhan, especially the political alliance established through marriage with the local elite, can be interpreted as part of a strategy to legitimize the new dynasty.

Mirza Salimbek emphasizes that Iskandarkhan's grandsons — Dinmuhammadhon, Boqimuhammadhon, and Valimuhammadhon — were initially appointed as governors in Khorasan, where they gained military and political experience. After the Qizilbash invasion, the killing of Dinmuhammadhon by the Aymoq tribe during his return to Bukhara highlights the intensity of internal conflicts at the time. The remaining two princes — Boqimuhammadhon and Valimuhammadhon — arrived in Bukhara, where they were supported by local amirs and began efforts to restore the kingdom. The ascension of Boqimuhammadhon to the throne and the appointment of Valimuhammadhon as governor of Balkh are regarded as initial steps toward restoring a centralized system of governance by the dynasty. Their just policies and military successes served as a socio-political foundation for the dynasty's legitimacy.

The campaign launched by Shah Abbas against the territories of Transoxiana in 1608 highlights the complexity of Iran–Bukhara relations. The military resistance organized by Boqimuhammadhon and Valimuhammadhon against this invasion represents a vivid example of strategic thinking in the art of modern warfare. Boqimuhammadhon's decision to cross the Amu Darya with a small force yet firm determination and engage in battle reflects remarkable personal courage and patriotism.

The weakening of Shah Abbas's army due to stomach illnesses during the battle and their subsequent defeat granted a significant political and moral advantage to the Bukhara forces and reinforced the ruling position of the dynasty.

Boqimuhammadhon reigned for seven years and implemented effective reforms in state affairs. According to Mirza Salimbek, he is portrayed as a master of statecraft. His efforts to restore political stability, military readiness, and economic balance marked an important stage in the history of the Bukhara Khanate.

After Boqimuhammadhon's death, his brother Valimuhammadhon arrived from Balkh and officially ascended the throne. He appointed his nephew Imomqulikhon as governor of Balkh. Although this decision initially appeared to aim at preserving political stability, Valimuhammadhon's personal weaknesses soon began to erode his political authority.

In "Tarixi Salimiy", Valimuhammadhon is described as indulging in wine, engaging in behavior contrary to ethical norms, showing excessive interest in women, and displaying negligence in governance. These traits provoked public dissatisfaction and undermined trust in his rule. Under such conditions, a group of high-

ranking officials secretly approached Imomqulikhon, the governor of Balkh — a move interpreted as a passive form of dissent against central authority. Imomqulikhon's march to Bukhara and seizure of the throne signified that Valimuhammadhon had lost his political power. Valimuhammadhon's flight to the Iranian border and his hope for assistance from Shah Abbas II reflect two key aspects: on one hand, it highlights the intensifying struggle for the throne; on the other, it reveals Iran's attempt to directly intervene in Bukhara's internal affairs during this dynasty.

The defeat of the 80,000-strong Qizilbash army sent by Shah Abbas at the hands of Imomqulikhon demonstrates the strength of Bukhara's military and the power of the new ruler who had restored internal unity. The capture and execution of Valimuhammadhon are interpreted as a method of consolidating centralized authority through the elimination of political rivals.

Imomqulikhon's reign (36 years) is described in Bukhara's history as a period of stability, active foreign policy, and internal socio-economic development. His campaigns toward the Turkestan border regions and the suppression of instability among the Kazakhs and Karakalpaks were aimed at preserving the state's sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, the martyrdom of his son Iskandarkhan, who had been appointed governor of Tashkent, revealed the tensions in relations with local powers.

Following this, the punitive campaigns carried out by Imomqulikhon reflect a desire to strengthen central authority through strict governance. These campaigns were less about social justice and more an expression of political reasoning in administration. Nevertheless, Mirza Salimbek characterizes his reign as a period of rich cultural and spiritual development. The phrase "The world adorned itself like a bride twice..." is used to glorify this very era.

Imomqulikhon established diplomatic relations with major powers such as India and the Ottoman Empire. This not only demonstrates a pragmatic approach in his foreign policy but also indicates the growing international prestige of Bukhara.

At the end of his life, Imomqulikhon's withdrawal from political activity due to an eye illness and his transfer of power to his brother Nodirmuhammadhon can be seen as a rare example of political culture in the medieval Muslim world. Mirza Salimbek portrays Imomqulikhon's migration to Mecca and Medina and his dedication of the remainder of his life to worship as a reflection of the ruler's personal faith and devotion. His burial in the Baqi' cemetery represents an honorable form of death among Muslims.

The reigns of Valimuhammadhon and Imomqulikhon historically represent two contrasting models: the former is marked by personal weakness, negligence, and political incapacity; the latter by long-term stability, active foreign policy, and centralized governance. It was during Imomqulikhon's rule that the Bukhara Khanate not only restored internal stability but also secured a significant place in the region's political balance.

Through the fates of these two figures, one can draw historical lessons about how state governance, personal virtues, and relations with the people lead to different outcomes. Additionally, the events described in "Tarixi Salimiy" from this period serve as an important source on Iran-Bukhara relations, interactions with Kazakh and Karakalpak peoples, and internal political struggles in the history of Central Asia.

The reign of the subsequent ruler, Nodirmuhammadhon, is recorded in Bukhara's history as one of the most prosperous in terms of economic capacity and personal wealth. According to information in "Tarixi Salimiy", Nodirmuhammadhon owned 600 camel caravans, 80,000 horses, and 80,000 sheep. While these figures reflect his immense personal wealth, the text also includes references to his political weakness. He sought to use wealth as a tool in governance, yet failed to attain political legitimacy among the populace.

Although Nodirmuhammadhon commissioned the construction of a madrasa in Balkh, this act is interpreted not as a politically motivated initiative but as an attempt to win public favor through benevolence. His failure to consolidate his rule ended with his deposition by his son Abdulazizkhon within just two and a half years. This situation reflects the complexities of hereditary succession, where politically weak monarchs lose in the power games played even by their own descendants.

Nodirmuhammadhon's subsequent efforts — attempts to solidify authority through his sons in the provinces and to establish diplomatic ties with India and Iran — reveal his desire to re-enter the political arena. However, figures such as Aurangzeb and Murad Baksh, sent by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, viewed Nodirmuhammadhon merely as a political tool for achieving their own strategic goals. This, in turn, limited Nodirmuhammadhon's political independence and initiative.

The reign of his son, Abdulazizkhon, is recorded in the history of Bukhara as the longest-lasting, characterized by political stability, military activity, and resistance to external invasions. According to the "Tarixi Salimiy", after ascending the throne, Abdulazizkhon wrote to his

father requesting forgiveness for his past mistakes. Nevertheless, Nodirmuhammadhon's other sons — Subhonqulikhon and Qosimsulton — joined their father, which contributed to continued internal political strife during Abdulazizkhon's reign. This indicates that dynastic rivalry persisted even under his rule.

Nodirmuhammadhon attempted to establish relations with powerful states such as India and Iran, but these efforts ended without tangible results.

Abdulazizkhon succeeded in a campaign against the Indian army, reestablished control over Balkh, and preserved sovereignty. The historical significance of this lies in the fact that the Indian army, under orders from Shah Jahan, was commanded to withdraw from Balkh, and the expedition ended with losses in the Hindu Kush mountains due to logistical and terrain-related difficulties. According to "Tarixi Salimiy", in the final years of Abdulazizkhon's reign, the people of Urgench—particularly Abulgazi Khan and his son Anushakhan—carried out eighteen invasions against Bukhara. These incursions reflect the instability in the northern regions of Bukhara and the ongoing intense conflicts between Khorezm and Bukhara.

Anushakhan's sudden entry into Bukhara, and Abdulazizkhon's approach—entering the city center with only 40 men and calling his people to peace—demonstrates political courage, direct engagement with the public, and a desire to prevent bloodshed. This incident reveals that the ruler possessed not only power but also the wisdom and leadership necessary for governance.

The work states that when Abdulazizkhon reached the age of 74, he foresaw the future of his rule and peacefully handed over power to his brother Subhonqulikhon. This act indicates the formation of a tradition of peaceful power transfer within the dynasty. His departure on pilgrimage in 1091 hijri and subsequent death, with burial in the Baqi' cemetery, reflects the Bukhara rulers' adherence to religious values.

Though the era of Nodirmuhammadhon and Abdulazizkhon was marked by political struggles, external invasions, and internal succession disputes, it was also a time when state independence was preserved, international relations were balanced, and long-term stability was achieved.

In particular, Abdulazizkhon's long reign helped maintain the balance of political power in the region. His firm stance against the Urgench invasions, successful resistance to the Indian army, and personal competence made him one of the most significant figures of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty.

Abdulazizkhon is remembered not only for the duration of his reign but also for his contributions to the architectural transformation of Bukhara. The madrasa he built in the Registan area—now known as the “Gusfand Madrasa”—illustrates the attention given to urban architecture during his rule. Located opposite the Mirzo Ulugbek Madrasa, this structure was built to enhance political prestige and promote scientific advancement.

Furthermore, his restoration of the Friday mosque between the Shaykh Jalol and Qorako'l gates, and the legendary depiction of a giant boot there, likely served to boost the ruler's image among the people. These actions reflect Abdulazizkhon's reverence for religious and spiritual heritage and his broader cultural policy.

Subhonqulikhon's 22-year reign is characterized by internal stability and external expansion. During his lifetime, he conquered Urgench and solidified political control over Turkestan. His restoration of the “Darush-shifo” madrasa in Bukhara and appointment of governors there can be seen as part of a broader cultural and health-oriented policy.

However, the conflicts among his children (including mutual killings in Balkh) exposed internal political weaknesses. These disputes brought names like Iskandar, followed by Abdulloh Sultan, and ultimately Siddiq Muhammadkhon into the historical record. The suppression of Siddiq Muhammadkhon's rebellion by Subhonqulikhon through military force indicates that strict measures were taken to maintain political stability. Subhonqulikhon's burial near the mausoleum of Bahauddin Naqshband reflects his closeness to the religious heritage.

During the reign of Ubaydullokhon, political centralization weakened. Loyalty to him, strong in the early years, gradually diminished. Muqimkhon's attempt to have sermons and coins issued in his own name in Balkh shows that Ubaydullokhon had lost control over central authority. During this period, regional governors began to seek independence.

His irrational actions, failure to take responsibility, and refusal to heed the counsel of notables intensified the dissatisfaction of Bukhara's amirs. Eventually, he was martyred at a young age, and his brother Abulfayzkhon was placed on the throne. This event reflects the volatile balance of power within the state.

Abulfayzkhon's rule is historically considered one of the final strong efforts of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty. Although he was not an active political figure himself, during his reign, the state's administration was largely overseen by the amir Muhammad Hakimbiy Ataliq. Hakimbiy established justice, secured the roads, and suppressed rebellions. This situation indicates that de

facto power within the central government had shifted into the hands of the amirs. The threat posed by Nadir Shah was the most significant external challenge of this period. The campaigns led by Rizaquli Mirza, son of the Afsharid ruler Nadir Quli, along with the battles near Qarshi and the defensive efforts for Bukhara, reflect a complex stage in Bukhara–Iran relations. Abulfayzkhon's failure to achieve victory in these battles brought Bukhara closer to the sphere of Iranian influence.

Nadir Shah's arrival in Balkh, his campaign to Charjuy, and the subsequent rise of uprisings had severe consequences for the Ashtarkhanid dynasty. The intensifying political crises laid the groundwork for the emergence of the Manghit dynasty on the historical stage.

Although the Ashtarkhanid dynasty reached its peak during the reign of Abdulazizkhon, from the time of Subhonqulikhon and subsequent rulers, the state gradually weakened due to internal conflicts, succession struggles, and increasing external threats. In particular, during the reigns of Ubaydullokhon and Abulfayzkhon, political fragility, the growing power of amirs, and foreign invasions accelerated the dynasty's decline.

Nevertheless, this period saw the construction of architectural monuments, madrasas, and religious sites, with continued attention to science and spirituality—elements that now hold great value as part of the region's historical heritage.

The final years of Abulfayzkhon's reign marked one of the most perilous periods for the political sovereignty of the Bukhara Khanate. As a result of Nadir Shah's campaigns into Transoxiana, the khanate was effectively drawn into Iran's geopolitical orbit. Although diplomatic negotiations conducted by Abulfayzkhon through his envoy Muhammad Rahimbek temporarily eased Nadir Shah's aggression, real political power shifted into the hands of Muhammad Hakimbiy Atoliq. Nadir Shah's statement that “the affairs of Bukhara should be entrusted to Hakimbiy in order to protect the people from disorder” demonstrates the superiority of amirial power over the khanate authority in Bukhara. This event marked the beginning of a new phase in the struggle for power among the elite amirs.

Upon entering Bukhara, Nadir Shah temporarily restored peace in the country. By his order, 200,000 sacks of grain were collected and handed over to the state, indicating that Bukhara's economic resources were being utilized for Iran. In addition, 10,000 soldiers were selected and sent into the service of Nadir Shah, which can be interpreted as a form of de facto military

dependency.

The conquest of Urgench, the killing of local rulers, and the appointment of individuals loyal to Nadir Shah demonstrate the establishment of full Iranian influence in that region as well.

According to the work, Muhammad Rahimbiy arranged for Abulfayzkhan's son, Abdulmomin Khan, to be placed on the throne in his father's place. This transition signifies the effective end of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty as a political power.

After Nadir Shah's death, Aliqulikhon's claims over Bukhara intensified. The siege of the city by Iranian forces and the killing of Abulfayzkhan by the amirs during a moment of crisis indicate that this was not an ideological act, but rather a response to immediate political necessity. The last representative of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty thus exited the stage of history in a tragic manner. The reign of Abulfayzkhan represents a pivotal moment in the history of Transoxiana, marked by political instability, foreign invasions, and power struggles among internal forces. Nadir Shah's intervention further complicated this period. Amirs such as Muhammad Hakimbiy Atoliq and Muhammad Rahimbiy emerged in history as stronger political actors than the khanate itself.

This era laid the direct political groundwork for the end of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty and the rise of the Manghit dynasty. With the death of Abulfayzkhan, the symbolic and political authority of the khanate in Bukhara came to an end.

CONCLUSION

The role of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty in the history of Mawarannahr is defined by their efforts to maintain political stability, respond to internal succession conflicts, and resist external threats through both military and diplomatic means. Mirza Salimbek's *Tarikh-i Salimiy* serves as a valuable primary source that offers detailed insight into this complex period of Bukhara's political life.

The reigns of Abduaziz Khan and Subhanqulī Khan are characterized by relative internal stability and cultural development, whereas the later rulers—particularly Ubaydullah Khan and Abulfayz Khan—oversaw a period marked by weakened central authority, the rise of powerful amirs, and direct interference from external forces, notably Nader Shah of Iran.

Figures such as Muhammad Hakim Ataliq and Muhammad Rahimbiy effectively assumed the reins of governance, sidelining the khan's authority. This shift in the balance of power was a critical factor in the eventual collapse of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty and the rise of the Manghit dynasty.

The forced abdication and poisoning of Abulfayz Khan, under the pressure of internal conspiracies and foreign intervention, marks the symbolic and political end of Ashtarkhanid rule in Bukhara. The events surrounding his downfall reflect a deeper crisis in the structure of dynastic authority and the transformation of state governance in the region. The following recommendations can be made based on this article:

- 1. Enhance source-critical approaches** – Primary sources such as *Tarikh-i Salimiy* should be examined using contemporary historical methodologies, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the political and social structure during the Ashtarkhanid era.
- 2. Reassess the political legacy** – A critical evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the Ashtarkhanid administration can offer important lessons regarding political continuity and the mechanisms of power transition in Central Asian history.
- 3. Broaden focus on diplomatic history** – The diplomatic exchanges between Abulfayz Khan and Nader Shah, including emissaries and negotiations, represent a valuable case study in the international relations of early modern Central Asia and merit further academic exploration.
- 4. Integrate Ashtarkhanid history into educational curricula** – Presenting the dynasty's legacy beyond military campaigns—through their administrative, cultural, and diplomatic contributions—can enhance historical literacy and national consciousness among students.
- 5. Facilitate access to manuscripts and scholarly sources** – Digitizing and publishing key works such as *Tarikh-i Salimiy* on open-access academic platforms will significantly support future research and preserve historical heritage.

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