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THE INCORPORATION OF THE EMIRATE OF BUKHARA INTO THE ORBIT OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

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Abstract: This article reconstructs the stages through which the Emirate of Bukhara, the most populous and politically weighty of the Central Asian khanates, passed from formal sovereignty into the position of a dependent protectorate of the Russian Empire. Drawing on the established historiography of the Russian advance into Turkestan, the study distinguishes three analytically separate processes that are often merged in general accounts: the military defeat of the emirate between 1866 and 1868, the legal codification of dependence in the treaties of 1868 and 1873, and the slower economic absorption of the emirate's territory into the imperial market after the arrival of the Trans-Caspian railway. It is argued that Bukhara's survival as a nominally independent state until 1920 was not an accident of imperial inattention but a deliberate arrangement of indirect rule: St Petersburg preserved the throne of the Manghit dynasty because a compliant emir administered a densely settled Muslim population more cheaply, and with less risk of religious mobilisation, than a Russian provincial bureaucracy could have done. The consequence was a hybrid polity in which pre-modern forms of governance persisted alongside railways, cotton exports, joint-stock banks and a Russian customs frontier, and in which the emir's domestic authority was in certain respects strengthened even as his external sovereignty disappeared.

Keywords: Emirate of Bukhara, Russian Empire, Turkestan, protectorate, indirect rule, Manghit dynasty, treaty of 1873, cotton economy, Trans-Caspian railway, colonialism in Central Asia.

1. Introduction

The absorption of Central Asia by the Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century is frequently narrated as a single sweeping campaign, punctuated by the fall of Tashkent in 1865, of Samarkand in 1868 and of Khiva in 1873. Such a narrative flattens an important distinction. Two of the three Uzbek states of the region, Bukhara and Khiva, were never annexed; they retained their ruling houses, their courts, their tax systems and their religious establishments until the revolutionary upheavals that followed 1917. The Khanate of Kokand, by contrast, was liquidated in 1876 and converted into the Ferghana province of Russian Turkestan. Explaining why Bukhara followed the first path rather than the second is the central problem addressed here.

The question matters for two reasons. First, it illuminates the logic of imperial expansion itself. The decision to leave an Islamic monarchy standing on the empire's southern flank was taken by men who were fully capable of destroying it, and their reasoning reveals what the Russian state believed it could and could not govern directly. Second, the protectorate arrangement shaped the social history of the region for half a century. Because the emirate was screened from the administrative reforms, land settlement and legal codification introduced in the annexed provinces, its institutions ossified at the very moment when the surrounding territory was being reorganised. The gulf between Bukhara and

Russian Turkestan that the reformist Jadid intellectuals of the 1900s found so intolerable was, in this sense, a product of the protectorate rather than a survival that the protectorate had failed to remove.

The argument proceeds chronologically but is organised analytically. Section 2 sketches the condition of the emirate on the eve of the Russian advance and the structural weaknesses that made a rapid military collapse likely. Section 3 examines the campaigns of 1866–1868 and the settlement imposed after the battle of Zerabulak. Section 4 turns to the treaty of 1873, which converted a defeated neighbour into a formal dependency, and to the institutional machinery, above all the Imperial Political Agency, through which dependence was administered. Section 5 considers economic incorporation, which proceeded largely after and independently of the military settlement. Section 6 assesses the political and social consequences down to the fall of the dynasty in 1920, and the conclusion returns to the comparative question of why indirect rule was chosen and what it achieved.

2. The Emirate on the Eve of the Russian Advance

By the middle of the nineteenth century the emirate ruled by the Manghit dynasty controlled the middle Zarafshan valley, the oases of Bukhara, Karshi and Shahrisabz, the mountainous eastern provinces of the upper Amu Darya basin, and a shifting frontier zone in the direction of Merv. Its population, perhaps two to two and a half million, was overwhelmingly sedentary and agricultural, sustained by an irrigation network whose maintenance required continuous administrative attention. The city of Bukhara itself was the pre-eminent centre of Islamic learning in Inner Asia, with a dense concentration of madrasas whose graduates staffed judicial and clerical posts across the region. This religious prestige was a political asset of the first importance: the emir's legitimacy rested less on dynastic antiquity, which the Manghits conspicuously lacked, than on his standing as a defender of the sharia.

The weaknesses of the state were nonetheless considerable. Fiscal extraction depended on a patchwork of land taxes, tolls and irregular exactions collected through provincial governors who retained a substantial share of the proceeds, so that the treasury's real command over the emirate's wealth was far smaller than its nominal revenues suggested. The army combined a small body of regular infantry with tribal levies whose loyalty was contingent and whose training was rudimentary; artillery existed but was obsolete, and there was no system for supplying a force in the field for more than a few weeks. Relations with the eastern provinces, particularly Shahrisabz and Kitab, were chronically unstable, and the accession of Muzaffar al-Din in 1860 was followed by campaigns against precisely those regions whose military contingents would later be needed against Russia.

Equally consequential was the emirate's antagonism towards its neighbours. Successive rulers, and Nasrullah in particular, had pursued intermittent warfare against Kokand and Khiva rather than any coordinated defence of the region, and the Manghit intervention in Kokandi affairs in 1865, when Muzaffar occupied Kokand and took the khan's family into custody, coincided precisely with the Russian seizure of Tashkent. There was thus no possibility of a common front. Nor did the emirate possess an accurate appreciation of the force ranged against it. Diplomatic contact with St Petersburg had been episodic and mediated through envoys whose reports emphasised ceremonial reception rather than military capacity, and the court appears to have believed until 1866 that a Russian advance could be halted by a demonstration of arms in the field.

3. The Russian Advance and the Campaigns of 1866–1868

The Russian move onto Bukharan territory grew out of the unresolved situation left by the capture of Tashkent in June 1865. Mikhail Cherniaev had acted on his own initiative and against the caution of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which feared both the fiscal burden of expansion and British reaction; but once the city was held, the frontier could not be stabilised while the emir claimed authority over it and detained the Russian mission sent to negotiate. The detention of that mission in 1866 supplied the immediate pretext for war and, more importantly, transferred the initiative to the military party in Tashkent, whose members regarded a decisive engagement as the only means of settling the frontier permanently.

The fighting demonstrated the disparity between the two forces with brutal clarity. At Irjar on the Syr Darya in May 1866 a numerically superior Bukharan army was dispersed with negligible Russian casualties; Khujand fell later the same month, and Ura-Tepe and Jizzakh were stormed in October. Each engagement followed a similar pattern in which massed but poorly articulated Bukharan formations were broken by disciplined infantry fire and rifled artillery at ranges to which the emir's troops could not reply. The creation of the Governorate-General of Turkestan in 1867, with Konstantin von Kaufman as its first governor-general, gave the campaign an institutional base and a commander with plenipotentiary authority to conclude treaties, removing the need to refer each decision to the capital.

The decisive year was 1868. Samarkand, the second city of the emirate and the burial place of Timur, was occupied at the beginning of May after its inhabitants opened the gates, and the emir's last field army was destroyed on the Zerabulak heights at the beginning of June. A simultaneous rising against the small Russian garrison left in the Samarkand citadel, which held out for several days under siege, illustrated that popular resistance could be far more tenacious than the emirate's regular forces, but it came too late to affect the outcome. Muzaffar al-Din, facing both military defeat and the threat of deposition by a faction at his own court that had gathered around his son Abd al-Malik, sued for terms.

The settlement concluded in the summer of 1868 was harsh but limited. The emirate ceded the entire upper Zarafshan, including Samarkand and Katta-Kurgan, which were reorganised as the Zarafshan okrug under Russian administration; it accepted an indemnity of five hundred thousand tilla, payable in instalments; and it granted Russian subjects freedom of trade throughout its territory at a fixed and low tariff. What it did not lose was its dynasty. Kaufman, having concluded that the occupation of the whole emirate would require a permanent garrison and an administration for which neither men nor money existed, preferred to leave Muzaffar in place, weakened and financially indebted, and to use Russian power to secure him against his internal enemies. Russian troops accordingly assisted in the suppression of the revolt of Abd al-Malik and the reduction of the eastern principalities, an intervention that established the pattern of the following half-century.

4. The Treaty of 1873 and the Machinery of Indirect Rule

The agreement of 1868 had ended a war without defining a relationship. That definition came in the autumn of 1873, in the aftermath of the Khivan campaign, when a new treaty replaced the earlier terms with a comprehensive settlement. Its provisions ranged across commerce, navigation and jurisdiction: Russian merchants were guaranteed free movement and a customs duty of two and a half per cent on goods entering the emirate, Russian subjects obtained the right to establish trading agencies and to own immovable property, navigation on the Amu Darya was opened to Russian vessels, and the emir undertook to abolish the traffic in slaves. Crucially, the emirate surrendered the conduct of its

external relations; it could neither receive foreign envoys nor conclude agreements with third powers without Russian consent.

Formally, the treaty never used the word protectorate, and Bukhara continued to be described in Russian official language as a friendly neighbouring state. In substance the arrangement corresponded closely to the protectorates that Britain and France were constructing in the same decades. The distinguishing feature of the Bukharan case was the extent of internal autonomy that survived. The emir retained his own coinage, his own fiscal system, his own courts applying the sharia, and an army that Russian officers considered militarily worthless but that remained an instrument of domestic coercion. No Russian resident sat in the emir's council with authority to countersign his decrees, and there was no attempt to codify Bukharan law or to reform its administration from within.

The institution that mediated the relationship was the Imperial Russian Political Agency, established at the emir's capital in 1885 and soon housed in the new settlement of Kagan, some distance from the old city and beside the railway. The political agent was formally a diplomat, subordinate to the governor-general at Tashkent and to the Asiatic Department in St Petersburg, and his ordinary business consisted of the protection of Russian subjects, the arbitration of commercial disputes and the transmission of requests to the court. His informal influence was nonetheless decisive on any question that St Petersburg chose to define as its concern, since behind his advice stood the garrison of the Turkestan military district. The result was a form of authority that operated by anticipation: the emir's ministers learned to calculate what the agency would tolerate, and the agency rarely needed to issue commands.

Two features of this arrangement deserve emphasis because they explain its durability. The first is fiscal. Indirect rule cost the imperial treasury almost nothing, whereas the annexed provinces of Turkestan ran persistent deficits for decades. The second is religious. Officials in Tashkent were acutely conscious that direct administration of Bukhara, with its concentration of madrasas and its clerical establishment, would place the empire in the position of governing the region's Islamic institutions and would risk transforming an already sensitive population into an actively hostile one. Preserving the emir allowed the empire to obtain the strategic and commercial benefits of control while leaving the political costs of Muslim governance with a Muslim ruler.

5. Economic Incorporation

If the military and diplomatic subordination of the emirate was accomplished within a decade, its economic absorption was a longer process whose decisive instrument was the railway. The Trans-Caspian line, built westward from the Caspian and reaching the Bukharan oasis in the second half of the 1880s, reduced the cost of moving bulk goods between Central Asia and the industrial provinces of European Russia by an order of magnitude. Its arrival was negotiated rather than imposed: the emir consented to the passage of the line and to the creation of a Russian settlement at Kagan, on the calculation that the customs revenue and commercial activity it generated would accrue partly to him. The calculation was correct in the short term and profoundly mistaken in the long.

The railway made the export of raw cotton to Russian mills commercially rational, and the effects on Bukharan agriculture were rapid. Cultivators shifted land from grain to cotton, most decisively after the introduction of higher-yielding American varieties, and the emirate's oases became a supplier of an industrial input whose price was set in Moscow and Lodz. The consequences of specialisation were those familiar from other colonial cotton economies. Grain had increasingly to be imported, which

exposed the population to price shocks transmitted from outside; cultivators became dependent on advances made against the future crop, at rates of interest that transferred a substantial part of the harvest's value to intermediaries; and the fiscal health of the emirate came to depend on a single commodity market over which it exercised no influence whatever.

Financial and monetary integration followed. Branches of Russian joint-stock banks opened in Kagan and in the old city, extending credit to cotton merchants and gradually displacing indigenous forms of commercial finance. The Russian rouble circulated alongside the Bukharan tanga and progressively supplanted it in wholesale transactions; a monetary reform at the turn of the century fixed the relationship between the two currencies and, in doing so, subordinated Bukharan monetary policy to decisions taken in St Petersburg. In the mid-1890s the emirate was brought inside the Russian customs frontier, which was advanced to the Afghan border on the Amu Darya. This last measure completed the process: the emirate's territory now lay within a single imperial tariff space, so that its commerce with the world beyond passed through Russian customs houses and its market was reserved, in effect, for Russian manufactures.

6. Political and Social Consequences, 1885–1920

The reigns of Abd al-Ahad and of his son Alim Khan, which together span the period from 1885 to 1920, illustrate the paradox of the protectorate. Externally the emirate had ceased to be a subject of international politics. Internally the emir's position was in several respects stronger than that of his predecessors, precisely because Russian power had eliminated the two constraints that had historically limited Manghit authority: the threat of invasion by neighbouring states and the capacity of provincial magnates and eastern principalities to defy the capital. Rebellion against the emir now implied rebellion against the empire that guaranteed him, a calculation that the beks of the eastern provinces were obliged to make and that they consistently declined to accept.

The social costs of this stabilised autocracy accumulated over a generation. Taxation remained arbitrary and its collection was farmed out; the judiciary functioned without appeal against the ruler; public instruction remained confined to the maktab and the madrasa, whose curriculum had changed little; and the state provided nothing in the way of medical services or modern infrastructure beyond what Russian commercial interests built for their own purposes. The contrast with the annexed provinces, where Russian-language schools, printing presses, municipal institutions and a nascent periodical press existed, was visible to any Bukharan who travelled to Samarkand or Tashkent, and it was this comparison that shaped the outlook of the reformist Jadid circles that formed in the emirate after the turn of the century.

The Jadids' programme was in its origins pedagogical rather than revolutionary: they sought new-method schools, the teaching of arithmetic, geography and the natural sciences, printed textbooks in the vernacular, and a purified religious practice. It was nonetheless perceived as subversive by the clerical establishment and by the court, which after 1910 moved intermittently to suppress it. The disturbances of 1917 in the capital, in which reformist demonstrators were attacked and the movement's leaders were driven into exile in Russian-administered territory, exposed the fundamental instability of the arrangement. The emir's authority had come to depend on an external guarantor, and when the guarantor was itself convulsed by revolution the guarantee lapsed.

The end came in stages. Between 1918 and 1920 the emirate maintained a precarious independence, repelling an early and poorly prepared Bolshevik attempt against the capital, while the

exiled reformers organised themselves in Tashkent as an alternative government-in-waiting. In the summer of 1920 a properly mounted offensive by Red Army forces under Mikhail Frunze, coordinated with a rising inside the city, took the capital after several days of bombardment and street fighting. Alim Khan withdrew to the eastern provinces and eventually into Afghanistan, and the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic was proclaimed in his place. Resistance in the mountainous east continued for years within the wider insurgency that Soviet sources termed the Basmachi movement, but the dynasty was finished, and the republic itself was absorbed into the Uzbek SSR when the territorial reorganisation of Central Asia along national lines was carried out in 1924.

7. Conclusion

Bukhara's passage into the Russian orbit is best understood not as a single conquest but as three superimposed processes with distinct chronologies. Military subordination was achieved between 1866 and 1868 and was essentially a matter of technological and organisational disparity rather than of numbers. Legal subordination was accomplished in 1873 and refined thereafter through the practice of the Political Agency, producing a regime of indirect rule whose defining characteristic was the deliberate preservation of indigenous institutions. Economic subordination came last, was largely the work of the railway, the cotton market and the customs frontier, and was in the long run the most transformative of the three, because it reorganised the productive life of the oases in a way that no treaty clause had attempted.

The choice of indirect rule was rational from the imperial standpoint and, judged by its own criteria, successful: it delivered strategic security on the Afghan frontier, a protected market and a reliable supply of raw cotton, at a fiscal cost close to zero and without provoking sustained religious resistance. Its cost was borne by the emirate's population. Shielded from the administrative changes introduced in the annexed provinces, and governed by a ruler whose domestic power had been consolidated rather than curtailed, Bukhara entered the twentieth century with institutions substantially unreformed and with a widening gap between the expectations of its educated minority and the capacities of its state. The revolutionary destruction of the emirate in 1920 was, in this sense, the delayed consequence of the arrangement made in 1873: a state whose legitimacy had come to rest on foreign protection could not outlive the protector.

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