

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS TITLES AND POSITIONS IN THE GOVERNANCE OF THE KHANATES

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Abstract

This study explores the role of religious titles and positions in the governance of the Central Asian khanates. Special attention is given to the structure of religious authority, its interaction with the state administration, and the influence of religious leaders on political decision-making. The research analyzes institutions such as the qadi (judge), mufti, and shaykh al-Islam, focusing on their functions, powers, and hierarchical status within the state. The work is based on historical sources, archival documents, and the studies of Orientalists. This research provides deeper insight into the political-administrative structure of the khanates and sheds light on the relationship between secular and religious authorities in traditional Muslim societies.

Keywords: Khanates, religious titles, religious positions, state governance, qadi, mufti, shaykh al-Islam, religious authority, political structure, Central Asia, Islamic law, religious and secular power.

Introduction

The states formed in Central Asia—the Bukhara Emirate, Khiva Khanate, and Kokand Khanate—were characterized by unique political and social structures, in which religious organizations played a significant role in governance. Islam, particularly the Sunni Hanafi school, was widespread among the population of the region and functioned as an important socio-normative instrument in both state institutions and public life. Notably, religious titles and positions—such as mufti, chief qadi, qadis, preachers, teachers, and shaykh al-Islam—were considered among the highest-ranking offices. These officials not only led religious ceremonies but also actively participated in the fields of law, education, and administration. This article analyzes the roles of religious officials in governance, as well as their authorities, social status, and relations with the state, based on historical sources.

In the Uzbek khanates, religious titles and positions had different hierarchical levels. High-ranking religious positions included shaykh al-Islam, chief khawaja, caliph, a‘lam, shaykh, akhund, sudur, and oraq-oliy. Mid-level positions included naqib, mavlo, mudarris, domulla, imam, and imam-khatib. Lower-ranking positions comprised imomi jilov, muazzin, and sufiyi jilov. According to historical sources, local representatives of the population were often

appointed to positions such as shaykh al-Islam, chief khawaja, caliph, naqib sudur. [6:176-179].

Main Part. In the Bukhara Khanate, religious officials assumed control over the country's judicial authority, as well as social institutions such as madrasas, primary schools, and mosques—which played a significant role in daily life. As a result, they also took charge of managing these institutions. Influenced by this, during the Shaybanid period, provincial governors frequently turned to religious officials to strengthen their relationships with high-ranking authorities. Furthermore, members of the ruling elite also relied on the support of Sufis in their political struggles.[3:160-168].

During the rule of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty, the central government lost the ability to control the situation in the country. As a result, representatives of the dynasty had already lost a significant portion of the territory by the early 17th century. By the beginning of the 18th century, the crisis of the state deepened further. As mentioned above, during the Ashtarkhanid period, military and administrative officials possessed broad authority. Alongside them, major religious leaders—khawajas and religious officeholders such as the shaykh al-Islam, chief qadi, and sadr—also held significant influence. During this era, the Joibari khawajas held an elevated status in state governance, and the main religious officials were often selected from among them. In particular, in the central government, religious figures such as the khawajas, shaykh al-Islam, chief qadi, sadr, a'lam, mufti, rais, and mudarris played active roles. Their representatives also served in local administrations throughout the provinces as qadis, muftis, and rais. In the Bukhara Emirate, religious leaders held a unique place in socio-political life and state administration. There were many religious representatives in the emirate, and they possessed considerable influence. These religious figures were mostly composed of privileged social groups, such as sayyids and khawajas. In the governance system of the Bukhara Emirate, the following religious officials held prominent positions: shaykh al-Islam, chief qadi, naqib, military qadi (qoziaskar), a'lam, military mufti, mufti, rais, mudarris, chief imam, imams, muazzins, and others. The position of "rais" occupied a special role in the administrative structure of the Bukhara Emirate. This office was semi-religious and semi-disciplinary in nature. In the capital, there was a Chief Rais, while in the provinces (bekliks), local rais were appointed. The primary duty of the rais was to supervise the conduct and behavior of the population. The Chief Rais was commonly referred to as Eshon Rais or Rais ush-Shariat. All local rais were subordinate to the Chief Rais, who regularly inspected them before the emir. Based on the study of the duties, rights, and responsibilities of religious officials in the administrative structure of the Bukhara Emirate during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it can be concluded that the religious structures established during the reigns of Amir Timur, the Timurids, the Shaybanids, and the Ashtarkhanids remained almost unchanged in the Emirate's system of governance.[5:160-168].

In Khiva, the governance of the state was ideologically based on Islam. Laws were implemented in accordance with Sharia rules and regulations. By analyzing the roles and responsibilities of certain religious positions in the Khiva Khanate, we can find answers to some historically debated issues. Notably, the **shaykh al-Islam** was the highest-ranking figure

in the khanate. He was responsible for overseeing the proper execution of religious ceremonies. During such ceremonies, the shaykh al-Islam had the right to sit to the right of the khan.[1:3-55]

The **chief qadi (Qozi ul-quzzot or qozikalon)** was responsible for overseeing the implementation of Islamic law and regulations based on Sharia. The qozikalon had his own divan (administrative office) and court in the capital. In provincial centers, there were also regional qadis, and their courts were known as **dor ul-qazo**. In the military, the **military qadi (qozii askar)** was in charge of supervising legal matters and resolving Sharia-related issues.

The **mufti** was considered a legal scholar for the qadis. Muftis participated in trials, drafted rulings, and validated judgments by affixing their seals to official documents. In Khiva, there were seven chief muftis, and all of them had official status close to the khan. The army also had its own designated **military mufti (mufti lashkari)**. The **a'lam** was the head of the muftis. His responsibility was to examine the Sharia narrations presented in fatwas. After verifying the authenticity of certain reports against original sources, the a'lam would affix his seal of approval.

The **rais** were officials who supervised adherence to Sharia regulations and the proper performance of religious rituals such as fasting, five daily prayers, ablution, and charitable practices. It was also their duty to ensure that parents sent their children to school on time and that sellers in markets did not deceive buyers-by checking scales, for example. Each city and large village had its own rais, appointed by the khan based on the recommendation of the chief qadi.

The **mutawalli** was the financial officer responsible for managing charitable donations and administrative affairs in religious institutions. Madrasas also provided living quarters for them. The scholar **Sh. Vohidov**, who thoroughly studied sources, archival documents, and academic literature related to the history of the Khiva Khanate, has provided detailed information about the administrative roles, titles, and responsibilities within the khanate.[4:56]

In the Khiva Khanate, certain positions could be compared to either military or religious offices. In particular, special attention was given to military affairs and their financial provision, leading to the establishment of the **naqib** position. The **naqib** was an official who headed religious scholars and administrators in the field of education and upbringing. He was responsible for regulating the financial aspects of religious, political, and military matters within the palace. He also held the status of **commander-in-chief of the khanate's army**. [1:18-21]. As the khan's closest advisor in military affairs, he (the **naqib**) participated in all military campaigns. He was required to have deep knowledge of the army's size, armament level, formation, and military operations. In the Khiva Khanate, the **noble class**-consisting of local shaykhs and khawajas from the lineages of Sayid Ata and the Darvish Shaykhs was considered the most influential social stratum. They possessed **inviolable rights** and held great influence over all layers of society. Their privileges and rights remained unchanged, even if the ruling khan was replaced or killed. As in all medieval Muslim states, the **Muslim clergy in the Kokand Khanate** were regarded as a privileged social class. Their opinions carried

significant weight in **state administration, education, judicial affairs**, and various aspects of public life.

Religious and judicial officials in the khanate received **state-assigned salaries** and lived off various charitable donations. **Madrastas, mosques, and mausoleums** owned their own **waqf (endowment) properties**, and the income from these properties was used to pay the salaries of their staff. The **mutawalli** was the head official in charge of managing these waqf properties. [1:3-55].

Below are the titles and positions observed in the **judicial offices and courts of the Kokand Khanate**: **Qozi ul-quzzot**-Chief of Qadis; the supreme judge over all other qadis. **Qozi kalon** – Senior Qadi; supervised the activities of qadis and judicial offices in the capital and provincial centers. **Qozii mutlaq**-Supreme Judge; held the highest authority among judges. **Qozii askar**-Military Qadi; responsible for judicial matters in the army. During the reign of Umar Khan, this position was assigned to the historian Mirzo Qalandar Mushrif Isfaragiy. **Qozi rais**-A judicial officer who oversaw the implementation of fatwas issued by military muftis within the army. **Qozii jilav** -Traveling Qadi; served as a judge during journeys and military campaigns. **A‘lam** -A legal official responsible for determining punishments for sinners according to Sharia. **Muftiy** – Mufti; a scholar who issued religious legal opinions (fatwas). **Muftii askar** – Military Mufti; issued fatwas and handled religious matters within the army. **Mirshabxona sadri** – Head of the Mirshabs; chief of the court's guards. **Mirshab** – Guard of the judicial office and night watchman. **Mulozim (olomon)** – An ordinary servant or assistant in the judicial and court system.

Discussion. The role of religious titles and officeholders within the governance systems of the khanates was complex. They were not limited solely to religious and ceremonial duties but also played active roles in legal and administrative governance. For example, chief qadis and qadis conducted judicial processes based on Sharia law, striving to ensure justice within society. Their rulings held equal authority to the decrees of the khan, demonstrating the significant power of the religious judicial system. In addition, muftis and other high-ranking religious officials were recognized as primary sources for issuing fatwas and resolving religious legal matters. They served as key advisors in the political affairs of the khanates, and at times, khans would not make important decisions without their counsel. Such circumstances illustrate the close interconnection between religion and politics.

In the field of education, mudarris (teachers) and shaykhs taught in madrasas, where they provided both religious instruction and secular subjects such as jurisprudence (fiqh), logic, and philosophy. This underscores the invaluable contribution of religious officeholders to the shaping of public consciousness. In particular, scholars trained in the major religious centers—Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand—were recognized throughout the region. However, the broad authority of religious titles in state governance occasionally led to political conflicts. Especially during internal power struggles within the khanates, the partisanship of religious forces meant that rulers had to carefully monitor and manage their influence. This indicates that religious structures were not entirely independent, but operated in balance with political powers. In conclusion, religious titles and officeholders were crucial elements in the socio-political life of

the Central Asian khanates. As integral parts of the administrative system, they played a key role in establishing social stability, promoting moral values, and upholding the principles of justice within society.

Religious and judicial officials sustained themselves through state-assigned salaries and various charitable donations [2:164–165]. These sources of income included **fees from marriage registration (nikohona), inheritance taxes, confiscated property revenues (tarakona)**, and other similar payments.

Madrasas, mosques, and mausoleums possessed their own **waqf (endowment) properties**, and the income from these properties was used to pay their employees. The **mutawalli**, or administrator, was responsible for managing these waqf properties. The person who established the waqf could either appoint someone to this position or serve as the mutawalli themselves. Waqf properties were categorized into **“white waqf”** and **“black waqf.”** White waqfs were exempt from taxes and tributes, while black waqfs were required to pay tributes and other current taxes to the treasury. [1:3-16].

Conclusion. In conclusion, it can be stated that during the khanate period, religious titles and positions played an important role not only in religious and spiritual life but also in political and social governance. Officials such as **muftis, chief qadis, qadis, preachers, and teachers** carried out vital responsibilities such as ensuring justice based on Sharia, resolving civil disputes, managing the educational system, and raising religious awareness among the population. Overall, the direct involvement of **chief qadis** and **muftis** in the political affairs of the khanates and the significant weight given to their decisions clearly demonstrate the close relationship between **state and religion**. The participation of religious officials in governance served as one of the key factors in maintaining a stable social structure within the khanates. Therefore, when studying the history of the khanates, a **thorough analysis of the activities of religious institutions** and a proper evaluation of their role in socio-political life remains an important scholarly task.

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