

Procedures For Appointing Local Officials And Receiving Citizens In The Khanate Of Khiva

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ABSTRACT

This article is dedicated to the state administration system in the Khiva Khanate, the appointment of local officials, and the procedures for citizens' receptions at the palace. The article highlights the activities of the Council, various positions within the Khanate, palace ceremonies, the roles of officials such as the eshikog'a, and the distinctive features of the reception procedures. It also provides information about the political and social reforms implemented after the new Khan ascends the throne, as well as the Nurullaboy palace and the ceremonies held in the Ark.

Keywords: - Khiva Khanate, state administration, local officials, palace ceremonies, Eshikogha, Council, khan's reception protocol, Mehtar, Qushbegi, Devonbegi, Yasavulboshi, Qozikalon, khan succession, Nurullaboy palace, audience chamber, Ark fortress, customs, divan, Naqib.

INTRODUCTION

When discussing the administrative system of the Khiva Khanate, we paid special attention to an important aspect. Unlike the Bukhara Emirate and the Kokand Khanate, the Khiva Khanate had a continuously functioning Council (Divan). This Council consisted of holders of specific ranks and titles, such as inoq, mehtar, naqib, qushbegi, devonbegi, shaykh al-Islam, mutavalli, mirob, qozi, farmonchi, darg'a, arbob, miroxor, and others.

Although the Council, which included high-ranking officials, had limited authority—since all decisions were ultimately made by the Khan—it is still important to recognize the role of palace dignitaries, tribal leaders, and local governors in state administration.

During Council sessions, certain officials such as the mehtar, qushbegi, devonbegi, inoq, shaykh al-Islam, and yasavulboshi had decisive votes. The Council meetings were held at the Khan's

discretion, depending on the importance of the issues to be discussed [1].

The English scholar M. Holdsworth, in his work, discusses the administrative structure of the Khiva Khanate. He notes: "The Khiva Khanate differed from Bukhara and Kokand in that it was not composed of beyliks (districts) based on strong local and separatist traditions, except for the Qongirat, who were often autonomous. Secondly, the cities demonstrated strong local authority." [2] Indeed, as noted in local sources, the Khiva Khanate was governed without being divided into bekliks (districts). Regarding land ownership in the Khanate, the author shares almost the same view as foreign historians of the 20th century: land tenure practices were similar to those in Bukhara and Kokand—"land grants were distributed by the Khan to his servants, and these lands were exempt from all taxes, which were otherwise numerous."

The administrative principles, court reception

ceremonies, and procedures for receiving citizens in the Khiva Khanate were refined and improved over the centuries. From the 19th century onward, family traditions became dominant in matters concerning the throne, and this practice turned into a norm. The Khan's sons increasingly became the main claimants to the throne.

This development shows that, in the Khiva Khanate, family interests began to outweigh dynastic interests in succession to the throne. During the rule of the Qongirat dynasty, the succession rules established were followed relatively strictly. However, despite this, some researchers believe that the succession process in the Khiva Khanate never achieved full consistency or a clearly defined form [3].

During the ceremony of selecting the Khan, the importance of the Council officially increased. Usually, after the death of the previous khan, the heir apparent ("valiahd") was elected as the new Khan. In showing the candidacy for khan, the Inoq, Mehtar, Qushbegi, and Yasovulboshi played a major role. However, the election held within a narrow circle of high-ranking nobles and members of the khan's lineage had been predetermined in advance, and the appointment of the khan became more of a formal ceremony. According to custom, the newly elected khan would distribute robes of honor (sarupo) to a number of officials. This was considered a symbol of trust bestowed upon them. Sources provide important information about the court reception procedures in the Khanate of Khiva, the officials and servants of the Khan's palace, and their respective duties. Each palace servant had specific responsibilities in organizing receptions and carrying out various administrative tasks at the court. Historical records also contain interesting information about these servants and their duties.

In particular, at the head of all domestic affairs in the Khan's palace stood the Dasturxonchi. He managed the Khan's table — that is, the preparation of food and drinks for the Khan and the supervision of all services provided to him. In addition to him, there were other influential palace officials such as the royal chamberlain (kamerdiner), cook (oshpoz), pipe-bearer (chilimchi), water-bearer (qumg'onchi), towel-keeper (rumolchi), barber (sartorosh), manicurist (tirnoqchi), masseur (hodimchi), bedchamber attendant (to'shakchi), treasurer (xazinachi), and others.

The procedures for receiving local officials and

citizens at the palace of the Khan of Khiva had several distinctive features. According to historical sources, those seeking an audience with the Khan were first received by the Mehtar, who listened to their petitions. Then, depending on the seriousness of the petitioner's appeal, it was decided whether or not he would be allowed to appear before the Khan.[4]

The Mehtar and the Qushbegi would be present in their offices throughout the day, receiving cases submitted from the departments under their supervision. All decrees and orders issued by the Khan were immediately distributed from there. In exercising his authority, the Khan relied, on the one hand, on the Supreme Council (Oliy kengash) composed of numerous middle landowners and their representatives, the elders (oqsoqols).

The ceremonies held in the Khan's palace were marked by strict discipline and stability, reflecting the overall order prevailing throughout the khanate and the hierarchy of respect based on the ranks and positions of the nobility. The rituals observed in the palace at that time are noteworthy, as they vividly illustrate the administrative system of the Khiva Khanate.

The famous traveler A. Vámbéry, in his writings, noted that the Khan, like all Muslims, performed the morning fajr prayer together with his court officials. After the prayer, he had breakfast, and then invited scholars (ulama) for conversation, spending several hours listening to their views on matters of religion and state administration. After that, the Khan rested for several hours.

Following this, palace officials and local governors who were summoned for Salom (an audience) were received. During these receptions, the officials presented detailed reports to the Khan on the political situation in the khanate, the attitudes of the Turkmens, Kazakhs, and Karakalpaks toward the central authority, tax collection, and other pressing matters of the day. During these meetings, the Khan assigned various tasks and duties to his officials, specifying deadlines for their completion. Reports on the execution of previous assignments were also presented at such audiences. Officials who faithfully performed their duties were rewarded with various gifts and honors, while those who showed negligence in carrying out the Khan's orders were punished.

In these conversations with palace officials, issues concerning the foreign relations of the Khiva Khanate, the situation in neighboring countries, and relations with Iran, Russia, and other states

were also discussed, and necessary decisions were made.

During the reception of palace officials and local governors, the Inoq, Devonbegi, Mehtar, and Qushbegi played key roles. Officials were seated according to their rank and status in the court hierarchy. The highest-ranking officials sat to the Khan's left side — the side closest to his heart. The official responsible for maintaining order among the attendants and for ushering officials in and out of the Khan's audience was the Qushbegi. [5].

The official audience, known as the "Salom" ceremony, usually ended before the noon "peshin" prayer. After this ceremony concluded, the Khan would sit down for a second breakfast. Following the meal, he might converse again with his close officials and, on occasion, even play chess with some of them.

After the peshin prayer, the Khan would go to the Qabulkhana (audience hall), take his seat on a throne-like platform, and listen to the petitions and complaints (*arzu da'vo*) of the citizens of Khiva. According to historical sources, it was mandatory for the Khan to hear the grievances of ordinary people every day. Men and women, the elderly and children—all could come before the Khan with their petitions. There were no restrictions based on gender, age, or social status.

Typically, citizens could come to the Khan to resolve family disputes or arguments between neighbors. Although in some cases petitioners were advised to bring their matters before the Qozi (judge), many issues were resolved directly during the Khan's audience. Regardless of how simple a citizen's complaint was, the Khan was expected to listen and make a fair decision. The Khan's audience chamber was reportedly crowded with petitioners almost every day.

In this regard, the Iranian envoy Mirzo Rizoqulixon Sheroziy Lalabosh, in his embassy records, wrote: "In this region, there was no war, quarrel, theft, bribery, or denial of justice. No one fought with another, nor even raised their voice. Regardless of whether one was from a high or low class, if anyone had a grievance, he could go directly to His Majesty Muhammad Amin Khan without any obstacle and present his complaint. If the matter was secular, the Khan himself passed judgment; if it was religious, he referred it to the chief judge (Qazi kalon)."

According to the accounts of Khivan elders A. Abdullayev, P. Matchanov, and I. Vaisov, the Khan of Khiva tried to hold audiences every day and received people according to the seriousness of

their cases—sometimes in a formal, serious manner, and at other times more informally, depending on the situation.

Thus, it can be seen that the system of palace audiences in the Khiva Khanate had several distinctive features. There were virtually no artificial barriers preventing people from approaching the Khan. Receiving even ordinary citizens was considered one of the Khan's primary duties.

Farmers, herders, merchants, butchers—in short, any citizen who had a grievance—had the right to come to the palace and appeal directly to the Khan. However, no one could go straight to the Khan from outside without permission. A petitioner first had to meet a specific palace official at the entrance, and only with his consent could they enter the Khan's presence. This official was known as the Eshikog'a (doorkeeper or chamberlain).

According to the memoirs of Ismoil Mirpanji, an Iranian general who was held captive in Khiva between 1857 and 1864:

"Anyone who had a complaint for the Khan could come before him at a designated time without any hindrance. The Khan himself carefully examined and judged every matter related to him. If the issue was connected to Islamic law, he referred it to the "Qozi". Minor neighborhood disputes were settled by small local clerics. The decrees and orders issued from the Khan's council were concise, clear, and precise."

To submit a petition to the Khan, one first had to meet with the Eshikog'a (the doorkeeper or palace gatekeeper). Every petitioner recognized the Eshikog'a by his *oybolta* (a ceremonial axe), which was the symbol of his office. The Eshikog'a would ask citizens about the purpose of their visit, and if there were many petitioners, he would arrange them in order and strictly ensure peace and order.

The astronomer Solomanin, who came to Khiva with the Russian troops in 1873, wrote: "I saw an old man holding a staff, maintaining order in the palace of the Khan of Khiva." That old man was, in fact, the Eshikog'a.

According to archival documents of the Khanate, "The Eshikog'a was a palace servant who was required to possess an *oybolta*." In 1872, when a new Eshikog'a named Yoqubboy was appointed, he was presented with a knife and an *oybolta* valued at 20 gold coins (*tillo*).

Not only petitioners but also palace officials had to ask permission from the Eshikog'a before entering the Khan's presence by saying, "Who is inside,

Eshikog'a?" This was because the Eshikog'a was responsible not only for guarding the palace gates and doors but also for protecting the ruler himself. In addition, the Eshikog'a was obeyed by palace attendants such as guards (navkar), trumpeters (karnaychi), flute players (surnaychi), runners (shotir), camel drivers (sarbon), and heralds (jarchi).

In the 19th century, several notable palace Eshikog'as of the Khiva Khanate included Pahlavon Kenagasli, Husayn Vays, Muhammad Karim Urganjiy, Muhammadquli, Rahmon, and Ollabergan. Each of them commanded between 25 and 50 guards (navkars).

If the Eshikog'a traveled outside the palace on an official mission, he was given money and a horse for the journey. According to archival data, on the 20th of the month of Rajab in 1867, Muhammadquli Eshikog'a was sent on an expedition to the Yovmud district, during which he was given 10 gold coins, and his attendants were also provided with a certain amount of money. This money was intended for food and supplies during their desert journey.

Another document from the same year records the following instructions:

"Give the horse in Haji's possession to Muhammadquli Eshikog'a."

"Provide Rahmonberdi Eshikog'a's servant Yusuf the runner with the dun-colored horse belonging to Muhammad Niyoz the gunman."

Thus, whenever the ruler's Eshikog'a set out on a mission, he was rewarded with money and a horse. Indeed, the Eshikog'a was one of the Khan's most trusted servants, responsible for maintaining the security and tranquility of the palace.

According to Ogahi's testimony, from the very beginning of his reign, Olloqulixon governed the state and the khanate with a strong reliance on justice. In particular, in the work Riyoz ud-davla, in the section titled "Ba'zi voqeai zikrikim, hazrati a'lo hoqonning xilofat tojig'a jilus qilg'och, kechasi ul xazratdin vuqu' topibdurur," we find evidence crucial for studying Uzbek statecraft.

Olloqulixon, adhering to the discipline of governance and seeking counsel on state affairs, convened a council of senior officials and the era's most prominent jurists. He reviewed the composition of the central administration (devon) and implemented the following measures:

The position of Inoq—previously held by his late uncle, Amiri Kabir Qutlug' Murod—was given to his contemporary Muqammad Nazar.

Raqmonquli Inoq was appointed as governor of Hazarasp, one of the largest provinces in the khanate.

At a major council (katta dasturxon), urgent provincial matters were discussed. These included leaving the taxes collected from the province in place, allocating additional funds from the khanate to restore economic activity, and carrying out cultural and educational initiatives.

Some experienced officials working in the central devon were sent on permanent assignments to the province, and all of them were dispatched on the same night.

This shows that Olloqulixon prioritized justice, efficient administration, and the careful deployment of capable officials to manage both central and provincial affairs.

From the very day a new khan ascended the throne, he would review the key officials managing the state, retain those he deemed suitable, and appoint his trusted people to certain positions. This was, of course, an extremely important procedure. Initially, it was aimed at preventing the usual discontent that could arise in the country, and at blocking the attempts of high-ranking officials to exploit the period of a khan's succession to weaken the state and pursue their own ulterior motives.

Although the prestige of the mehtar, qushbegi, and devonbegi depended on their personal qualities, the administrative power and authority of the mehtar were broader. "Muqammad Yoqub, the mehtar, was just like an atasi [high-ranking elder]," writes N. Zalesov. "He was in charge of the southern part of the khanate and was responsible for foreign relations. Yoqubboy was forty years old and among the khan's close aides, he was the one who helped us the most."

A.Kun, who studied the administrative structure of the Khiva Khanate, writes: "The main tax collectors in the country were the devonbegis, qushbegi, and mehtar. Each of them had their own office, and within these offices, there were three or four devons, one of which was the chief. The devons maintained records of income and expenditure."

At the khan's court, there was also a special devonbegi, who acted as the khan's official secretary. Judicial proceedings in the khanate followed established traditions. At the head of the courts was the qozikalon, who dealt with civil disputes among the citizens of the khanate. Cases

requiring capital punishment were not his responsibility; such matters were handled solely by the khan.

The yasovulbashi was responsible, under the khan's orders, for leading the troops to war in a timely manner. During peacetime, yasovulbashis were present at ceremonies where the khan received various petitions. In official receptions at the khan's court, yasovulbashis did not have a fixed place, but they participated in the khan's inner council alongside the mehtar, qushbegi, and devonbegi.

M. Yo'ldoshev writes: "The yasovulbashi commanded the yasovuls, mirshabs, shotirs, and eshik oqolars," but for some reason, there is no information about the mirshabs' direct superiors concerning the dorug'as. The management of the military status of cities and fortresses was in the hands of the dorug'as.

From the last statement, it can be inferred that the head of the dorug'as was the intermediary through whom the yasovulbashis communicated with other dorug'as and mirshabs. Maintaining internal order in the khanate was the responsibility of the mirshabs. They were stationed at the main city gates to monitor people coming and going. Additionally, some mirshabs accompanied troops during military campaigns.

The naqib was a high honorary title for sayyids and khwajas. The naqib was one of the khan's closest advisors and accompanied him on journeys. The naqib was a madrasa graduate and had to be of prophetic lineage. In official reception ceremonies, the naqib sat in the first position on the khan's left side.

During the Khiva Khanate, local officials typically received citizens through local community organizations, usually formed by families in villages. These communities were responsible for resolving issues such as cultural and artistic development, education, household and road maintenance, water supply, and many other matters.

Local officials were typically chosen and monitored by the heads of these communities and families, who also assisted them in their duties.

It can also be mentioned that the khan's reception ceremonies were held in specially constructed palaces. According to Bayoni and Ogahi, the "Nurullaboy" pavilion in a newly constructed garden, facing the rising sun, was very beautiful. Ogahi described it as "Ko'rinishxona u valo" (the grand pavilion), and according to abjad calculation,

it dates to Hijri 1276 / Gregorian 1859.

In its time, reception ceremonies were held outdoors in the pavilion during summer. After the death of Feruz, Isfandiyor Khan (1910–1918) built a new style Nurullaboy palace for himself, completing the constructions in the garden. The newly built reception hall was intended for receiving foreign (Russian) guests. The construction of reception halls at Toshhovli Palace and Nurullaboy, along with the old palace Ko'hna Ark, gave the ancient Khiva khans' residence its name.

The khan's residence—the Ark—was where all political, economic, religious, and other state matters were addressed. In front of the Ark, various national celebrations were held, and official decrees were read to the public.

In 1863, the Hungarian scholar Arminiy Vamberi, who visited Khiva, wrote: "Like the palaces of all rulers in Central Asia, the Khiva Ark is very strong and surrounded by two fortress walls. At the entrance to the Ark, there are two cannons. These cannons, decorated with carved patterns, were probably made in Delhi."

The internal courtyard of the Khiva Ark was more than one hectare and was accessed through the main eastern gate. The Ark gate was guarded by more than ten navkars under the command of the mirshab.

During the khanate period, after entering the Ark, one would go directly through the hallway to the khan's audience hall. Before entering the hall, visitors underwent a special inspection to be admitted. In the Khiva Khanate, the Ark's audience hall, called Arkhona, Salomkhona, or Korinishkhona, consisted of a large veranda with the ruler's throne, a winter reception room, and was surrounded by the divan room, treasury, and other service chambers. On the round platform in front of the veranda, a yurt covered with white felt was set up. This white yurt was used to receive nomadic Kazakh, Karakalpak beys, and Turkmen leaders, and after the main ceremonies, a feast was held. The coronation ceremony, where the new khan was crowned and ascended the throne, also took place here.

Customs administration in the khanate was well-organized, with clearly defined duties. Sources note that during the reign of Khiva Khan Muhammad Rahimkhan I, a palace official named Khoja Mahram was appointed head of the customs office. In 1839, a special madrasa was built in the Ichan-Qala center of Khiva under Khoja Mahram's supervision to train experts in customs

administration. This madrasa accommodated 30 students at a time.

Regarding markets, A. Abdurashulov notes that within the Polvon Gate of Khiva, there was a covered market where trade stalls existed even before 1835, prior to the construction of a special caravanserai by Ollakulikhan. These stalls served the function of a caravanserai.

The system of governance, existing offices, titles, and their holders in the Khiva Khanate have been studied by researchers such as M. Matniyozov, A. Sotliqov, Q. Munirov, Davlatyor Rakhim, Shihnazar Matrasul, Sh. Vahidov, N. Polvonov, and S. Soburova.

S. Soburova, in her dissertation, discussed the full names of the offices and titles in the khanate, their meanings, the individuals holding them, and the salaries they received. M. Matniyozov and A. Sotliqov also note that by this period, it was strictly prohibited to arbitrarily collect money from citizens as wages for state officials. Salaries were set by the khan according to rank: lower-ranking officials received three gold coins annually from the treasury, while senior palace officials earned between 350–500 gold coins.

The authors emphasized that their research relied on both local and Russian sources, as well as archival documents.

Regarding state positions, the “Sayid Islomhodja” treatise notes that the families of state officials often held the same professions over generations. For example, the father of Sayid Islomhodja, Asfandiyorkhan’s chief minister, was Ibrahim Hodja, and his uncle, Sayid Abdullakhodja, held the position of Grand Vizier during Muhammad Rahimkhan II’s reign. Q. Munirov notes that after Munis’s death, his nephew Ogahi and subsequently Ogahi’s cousin Muhammad Karimkhan were appointed as mirob (treasury officials). Similar information is recorded in the works of Davlatyor Rahim and Shihnazar Matrasul. The “Firdavs ul-Iqbol” mentions that Munis had 7–8 ancestors who served as mirob or in other offices.

Overall, as N. Polvonov concludes in his article “Appointment Procedures in the Khiva Khanate,” the khans appointed knowledgeable and capable individuals to state positions, who served to maintain peace and order in the country.

The Khiva state, among the late medieval Uzbek khanates, was distinguished by its state traditions, palace protocols, and certain unique administrative features. In summary:

Centralization of power and the khanate’s

transformation into a strong state were closely linked to improvements in administration and socio-economic reforms. Notable reforms were carried out by Abulgazikhan in the mid-17th century and Muhammad Rahimkhan I in the early 19th century.

Previously, the khanate was divided into numerous beklik (local chiefdoms), whose rulers amassed significant landholdings and often resisted central authority. Muhammad Rahimkhan I abolished this division, organizing the country into 15 administrative districts, later expanded to 26.

Regional administration was further divided into mosque-based communities (masjid-qavm), totaling 1,578 across the khanate. Governors were appointed by the khan, while mosque judges (qozis) and elders were appointed by the governors. Only respected individuals among the people could hold these posts.

The state administration was streamlined and reduced. During Abulgazi Bahodirkhan’s reign, there were 360 offices, which made governance difficult. Excess offices were eliminated, reducing the administrative structure to 100 posts from the lowest to the highest level. Experienced and knowledgeable officials were appointed to these positions, with salaries determined by their rank. Arbitrary collection of wages from citizens was strictly prohibited.

The Supreme Council (Oliy Kengash) was established as the highest governing body, responsible for legislative, administrative, and supreme judicial functions.

In this way, by studying the palace reception procedures and the history of court ceremonies in the Khiva Khanate, one can observe a number of traditions and unique features characteristic of late medieval Uzbek statehood. Future research in this area can bring new information into the academic sphere, which in turn plays an important role in clarifying new aspects of Uzbek statehood, governance, and the protocols and ceremonies of the royal court.

According to established protocol, the enthronement ceremonies of the khan primarily took place in the capital city. However, in years marked by political instability or struggle for the throne, deviations from this practice sometimes occurred. Before the capital was moved to Khiva, the cities of Vazir and later Kuhna Urganch held significant political importance as centers of Khorezm.

Analysis of the sources shows that during reception ceremonies or other important events, high-ranking officials and title holders were seated in the long corridor (ravoq) in the following order: the khan sat in the center along the wall facing the entrance. On the khan's left were the nobles and military leaders, including the naqib, amirul-umaro, chief inoq, two mutawallis, the khan's sayid lineages, shaykhulislom, four otaliqs, four inoqs, four beys, four mirobs, three darg'as, three arbobs, two oqo, and three wealthy merchants. Two of the merchants came from Yangi Urganch and one from Khankah. On the khan's right, along the wall, the ulama were seated in order: the chief qazi, qazi askar, a'lam, mufti, followed by previously granted titles, and finally the mudarris (teachers).

In conclusion, Muhammad Rahimkhan I initially improved relations with Bukhara, but in the 1820s, due to internal uprisings in Bukhara, he extended his authority to the areas around Merv. During Nasrullo's reign, relations with Bukhara remained friendly, and under Ollakulikhan, peaceful neighboring relations were firmly established. However, from the 1830s onwards, relations deteriorated, though by the end of his life, Ollakulikhan contributed to establishing peace between Khiva and Bukhara.

It should also be noted that in the 19th century, diplomatic relations developed between the Khiva and Kokand khanates, evolving according to the political situation. The repeated visits of Kokand envoys to Khiva indicate the active role of the Kokand khanate in these interactions. While local historians' works remain primary and reliable sources for studying diplomatic relations between Khiva and Kokand, corroborating these accounts with archival documents and other sources, and analyzing them comparatively, can reveal new dimensions of the issue.

Thus, by studying the palace reception procedures and the history of court ceremonies in the Khiva Khanate, researchers can identify traditions and unique features of late medieval Uzbek statehood. Future research in this area will bring new information into the academic sphere, thereby playing a crucial role in elucidating previously unknown aspects of Uzbek statehood, governance, and court protocols and ceremonies.

It should also be emphasized that contemporary researchers have provided extensive information on the political, social, and economic situation of the Khiva Khanate, and studying and analyzing these materials presents a significant task for

historians.

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