



## **RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKESTAN AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE 16TH CENTURY (BASED ON OTTOMAN ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS)**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the multifaceted diplomatic, military, and economic relations between the Khanates of Transoxiana (Bukhara and Tashkent) and the Ottoman Empire during the 16th century, based on the "Mühimme Defterleri" (Registers of Important Affairs) and other primary sources from the Ottoman Archives. The study analyzes military alliances formed against the Safavids during the reign of Abdullah Khan II, diplomatic protocols concerning the security and provision of envoys, and the socio-legal patronage extended to Turkistani pilgrims and scholars. Through a comparative analysis of archival materials, the research substantiates the pivotal role of the Turkistan Khanates in the international political arena of the 16th century and the convergence of mutual interests with the Ottoman State.

**Keywords:** Ottoman Archives, Mühimme Defterleri, Khanate of Bukhara, Abdullah Khan II, Tashkent Sultans, Darvesh Khan, diplomatic protocol, Safavids, Hajj routes, Astrakhan, trade diplomacy, 16th century.

### **Introduction**

The significance of archival documents, which serve as the fundamental pillar of source studies in historical science, is paramount. Indeed, they provide access to the most reliable data concerning the political, economic, social, and cultural life of states. In particular, integrating documents related to the history of Turkistan—currently preserved in foreign archives—into scholarly circulation remains one of the most pressing issues facing contemporary Uzbek historiography. Today, a wealth of documents related to the history of Turkistan is preserved in the archives of major nations such as Russia, Turkey, Germany, and Britain. Among these, the Ottoman



Archives in Turkey hold particular significance, being one of the largest source centers under the Directorate of State Archives of the Republic of Turkey. It houses a vast collection of political-diplomatic agreements, treaties, various forms of state registers (defters), and other diverse documents spanning from the early periods of the Ottoman Empire to its dissolution. These archival materials serve as a crucial source not only for illuminating the history of the Ottoman Empire itself but also for studying its political, economic, legal, religious, and cultural relations with Eastern countries, including the regions of Turkistan. The research of Ottoman documents contributes to uncovering new facets of Turkistan's history and further elucidating the connections of the Uzbek people with Anatolia and the Near East.

The Ottoman State Archives (Başbakanlık) house over 150 million documents [1, XXVII s.], of which more than 30,000 are directly related to the history of Turkistan. In Uzbek historiography, documents pertaining to Turkistan's history preserved in the Ottoman archives remain largely unresearched. Dr. Sherzodxon Mahmudov, Head of the Medieval History Department at the Institute of History, utilized documents from collections such as the Hatt-ı Hümayûn (HAT), the Grand Vizier's Office (A.DVN.NMH), and the Political Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (HR.SYS) during his research on the relations between the Khanate of Kokand and the Ottomans.

The foremost distinctive feature of these documents is that they were written in "Ottoman" Turkish—a linguistic synthesis of Turkish, Persian, and Arabic that is no longer in colloquial use. Their second characteristic lies in the variety of calligraphic scripts employed. Among the numerous styles, such as Tavqi, Riq'o, Muhaqqaq, Rayhani, Thuluth, Naskh, Ta'liq, Divani, Siyakat, and Riq'a, those most frequently utilized were Thuluth, Naskh, Ta'liq, Divani, Riq'a, and Siyakat. This paleographic diversity demands that the historian and source specialist possess advanced linguistic and calligraphic proficiency to accurately read, interpret, and integrate these documents into scholarly circulation.

Consequently, one of the most pressing tasks facing Uzbek historiography is the profound study and integration of these Ottoman archival documents into scholarly circulation. This process will not only serve to uncover new facets of Turkistan's history but also contribute to a broader elucidation of the historical ties between the Uzbek and Turkish peoples.



## MAIN PART

In the course of the research, nearly 100 documents pertaining to the political, economic, social, and cultural history of 16th-century Turkistan were identified. These documents encapsulate diplomatic correspondence between the Khans of Turkistan and the Ottoman Sultans, matters regarding the formation of joint military-political alliances against foreign adversaries, and the protocols for receiving, accommodating, and providing for envoys sent from Turkistan. Furthermore, data concerning the Hajj pilgrimages undertaken by Turkistani pilgrims through Ottoman territories, alongside the material and organizational assistance rendered to them by the Ottoman government, hold particular significance. Additionally, the documents contain valuable historical information regarding the religious and educational activities of shaykhs traveling from Turkistan to the Ottoman realms, as well as the commercial endeavors of Turkistani merchants.

Political relations between the Shaybanids and the Ottomans became further invigorated during the reign of Abdullah Khan II. Specifically, there are approximately 20 documents concerning the diplomatic relations between the two states during this period. The majority of these documents pertain to the reception, provision, and security protocols for envoys arriving from Turan. Furthermore, there are archival records regarding the formation of military alliances for joint campaigns: against the Safavids to the south [10], and against the Russians to the north to liberate Astrakhan [17; 18].

Document No. 465 of the Mühimme Defteri No. 21, preserved in the Ottoman State Archives, is a letter sent by Sultan Selim II to Abdullah Khan. In this letter, dated April 1573, the Sultan acknowledges the receipt of a missive from Abdullah Khan delivered via the envoy Amir Abdullah and provides information regarding the measures being taken to ensure the security of the Hajj route. Furthermore, the Sultan reports on his campaign against Venetian pirates who had been attacking caravans of pilgrims and Muslim merchants in the Mediterranean, leading to the conquest of the Island of Cyprus. He expresses his commitment to the protection of Muslims and his desire to further strengthen the friendly relations between the two states [7].

Once Abdullah Khan II had consolidated his political authority, he initiated military campaigns to reclaim territories that had fallen under Safavid control to the south, particularly the region of Khorasan. To this end, he sought to establish a strategic military alliance with the Ottoman Empire against the Safavids. In turn, the Ottoman



State also prioritized the development of political and military cooperation with the Shaybanids, aiming to strengthen the empire's eastern frontiers and expand its sphere of influence within the region.

Document No. 403 of the Mühimme Defteri No. 32, dated 22 Jumada al-Awwal 986 AH (July 27, 1578 AD) and preserved in the Ottoman Archives, contains crucial information regarding the initial attempts to form a military alliance between Abdullah Khan and the Ottoman Sultan. According to the records, in Rabi' al-Awwal 985 AH (May–June 1577 AD), Abdullah Khan, in conjunction with the Sultans of Tashkent, launched a military campaign into the Safavid-controlled territories of Khorasan. Subsequently, he dispatched an envoy named Abdullah to Edirne to request Ottoman assistance in the struggle against the "Qizilbash" (Safavids). Meanwhile, the Safavid ruler, Shah Tahmasp, also proposed a peace treaty and the improvement of mutual relations through an envoy named Shah Quli. Consequently, due to the peace initiative from the Persian side, the request of the Uzbek envoy remained temporarily unaddressed.

However, after the peace negotiations between the Safavids and the Ottomans concluded unsuccessfully, a decree was issued to the Ottoman Vizier Mustafa Pasha with the following mandate:

"I have decreed that upon the arrival (of my command), you shall observe and investigate the enemy fronts. Subsequently, as necessitated by the circumstances, you shall exert all your strength with diligent preparation. At the opportune moment and in required locations, you must achieve grand feats and glorious deeds in defeating the enemy and conquering their lands and provinces, dedicating your entire power to the path of the Radiant Religion and my Eternal State. Furthermore, you shall not neglect to report any ill tidings informed from the upper regions or any other conditions that necessitate notification [10]."

In the work "Abdullanoma" by Hafiz Tanish Bukhari and "Musakkhir al-Bilad" by Muhammadyar ibn Arab Qataghan, these events are attributed to the years 974–975 AH (1566–1567 AD). According to these sources, in late 1566, Abdullah Khan formed a political-military alliance with his brothers Ibadullah Sultan and Khusrav Sultan, as well as Tahir Sultan (son of Darvish Khan, the governor of Tashkent) and Abdulatif Sultan from the Samarqand Sultans, and subsequently launched a military campaign into the territory of Khorasan [19, 263 b.; 20, 10-11 b.].



Another record, Document No. 664 from the Mühimme Defteri No. 32, preserved in the Ottoman Archives, also elucidates the matter of a military alliance between the Ottoman Sultan and Abdullah Khan against the "Qizilbash" (Safavids). In this document—specifically a letter from the Ottoman Sultan to the Khan of Crimea—it is stated that campaigns against the Safavids are highly beneficial. The Sultan further informs the Crimean Khan that he has dispatched a missive to Abdullah Khan, the ruler of Bukhara, through trusted envoys, urging him to launch a coordinated military offensive against the Safavids from his direction [11].

In a letter dispatched by the Ottoman Sultan to the Khan of Crimea in 1579, it is stated that the previously requested ammunition and military equipment had been fully delivered. Furthermore, other necessary supplies noted in a missive received via the Crimean envoy Rajab were prepared and intended for transport through the same envoy. The letter explicitly instructs the Crimean Khan not to wait for these arriving supplies but to proceed immediately toward Demirkapı (the Iron Gates). There, he was to convene with Osman Pasha, Commander Mustafa Pasha, and other high-ranking emirs. The mandate further emphasizes the necessity of notifying the rulers of Bukhara and the Kumyks to unite all forces for a coordinated joint offensive against the enemy [12].

In a Nâme-i Hümâyûn (Imperial Letter) dispatched by the Ottoman Sultan in 1582 to one of the emirs on the empire's eastern frontiers—Boshiochiq Malik—matters concerning a military alliance with Abdullah Khan, the Ruler of Bukhara, are also addressed. Specifically, the document notes that forces are being directed against Iran from all sides and records that Abdullah Khan of Bukhara has likewise signaled his intent to launch an offensive against Iran. Furthermore, as a significant number of Rumelian and Tatar troops were dispatched to Shirvan via Kaffa, and orders were issued to the Beylerbeys of Erzurum and Çıldır to provide assistance to Georgia, the decree instructs that in the event of a conflict with Simon or an attack from the Iranian side, they must respond accordingly; however, they are cautioned not to directly instigate hostilities themselves. Simultaneously, they are commanded to ensure the preparedness of food supplies and weaponry reserves [13].

The documents preserved in the Ottoman Archives concerning the reception, provision, and security of envoys arriving from Turkistan also hold particular significance. Through these records, it is possible to obtain invaluable data regarding the travel routes and transit points (guzargahs) of the envoys, the services rendered to



them, and the comprehensive measures undertaken to ensure their safety during their journey.

Specifically, Document No. 716 in the Mühimme Defteri No. 21, dated May 5, 1573, which is dedicated to ensuring the security of envoys, states the following:

"Issued to this envoy. Dated 3 Muharram 981 AH.

Decree to the Bey of Kaffa:

As the matters concerning the envoy who arrived at my Felicitous Threshold (Imperial Court) from Bukhara have been concluded, and as he has requested permission to journey back to that region, my supreme permission is granted. I have commanded:

Upon the arrival of the envoy, you shall notify and alert the emirs in the vicinity of Azov—Yakhshi Saat Mirza, Islom Mirza, and Qazi Mirza. Necessary assistance shall be rendered to ensure that the aforementioned envoy and his retinue may cross the Itil (Volga) River without hindrance. No one shall commit any aggression (attack) against them, their retinue, their property, or their animals; their safe and secure arrival must be guaranteed. Furthermore, if necessary, they shall be provided with sufficient funds for their travel expenses [8]."

Another document preserved in the Ottoman Archives is dedicated to ensuring the safe and secure return of the envoy dispatched to Istanbul by Abdullah Khan, the Ruler of Bukhara. According to this record, to facilitate the envoy's return to his homeland via Demirkapı (the Iron Gates), specific personnel from the retinue of Osman Pasha—who was serving in the defense of Shirvan—namely Shatir Mehmed, Khusrav, and Ali Chavush, were assigned to the task. They were mandated to escort the envoy and cater to his requirements. The decree explicitly instructs that, in accordance with established custom, necessary supplies and equipment be provided, and that the envoy be conducted to his destination with the utmost security [14].

These documents underscore the paramount importance of ensuring the security of envoys within Bukhara–Ottoman diplomatic relations. Furthermore, it is evident that the state extended its meticulous attention beyond the diplomatic processes themselves, focusing significantly on the escorting, material provision, and safety of the envoys. This reflects the vital role that diplomatic protocol played in maintaining the stability and continuity of the relations between the two states.

A document from 1578 preserved in the Ottoman Archives concerns the arrival and accommodation of envoys from Bukhara in Istanbul. According to this record, upon



the arrival of the Bukhara envoys at the Darü's-saadet (Istanbul), it was necessary to furnish the Palace of Salih Pasha for their residence. To this end, funds were allocated from the state treasury, and four carpets were purchased for 12,000 akçe from Husayn Chavush, one of the chavushes of the Imperial Court. These expenses were covered by the state treasury. Furthermore, the matter of dispatching official correspondence to them should the need arise was also raised, and a formal petition regarding this was submitted by the zaim of Istanbul, Hurram Chavush [4].

This document serves as a vital source for elucidating the organizational and material facets of Bukhara–Ottoman diplomatic relations. It demonstrates that the reception of envoys was not confined merely to political processes; rather, their living conditions and provisions were subjected to specific state oversight. This clearly illustrates the high level of importance accorded to the relations between the Khanate of Bukhara and the Ottomans at the close of the 16th century.

Documents concerning social life elucidate the legal status and societal roles of individuals who arrived in the Ottoman State from Transoxiana. For instance, following a petition written by Defterdar Mustafa Chalabi regarding the insufficient financial means of Sheikh Muhammad Qazghani of Samarkand, who resided in Aleppo, an additional allowance was granted to him [9]. This document demonstrates that the Ottoman State provided social patronage to the ulema and religious figures of Turkistan.

Documents concerning economic matters primarily elucidate trade routes and financial relations. For instance, a decree regarding the construction of a new fortress near Demirkapı explicitly emphasizes that this structure was built to ensure the security of trade routes and to strengthen economic ties [16]. In another record pertaining to economic issues, it is noted that in 1573, the companions of Sayyid Ali—the envoy of Darvesh Khan, the Governor of Tashkent—sold fabrics they had brought to Basra for 7,000 lori. However, as the locals paid only 4,000 lori of the agreed sum, the Sultan issued a decree to the Beylerbey of Basra, commanding that such harm and loss should not be inflicted upon merchants and pilgrims arriving from other states. The decree further mandated that the Basrans who purchased the fabrics be identified and, following a judicial investigation by the Qadi of Basra, the merchants' full rights and payments be restored [2, p. 65]. Additionally, in a letter from Sultan Selim to Abdullah Khan, the Sultan highlights that to facilitate secure trade for Turkistani



merchants in the Near East, he struck a blow against Venetian pirates who were plundering traders and subsequently conquered Cyprus [7].

Among the legal documents, incidents involving fraud and forged documents are also recorded. For instance, a decree dispatched to the Qadi of Üsküp (Skopje) in 1560 ordered the arrest and transfer to Istanbul of an individual named "Sariq Imom" (the Yellow Imam), who had forged an authorization letter in the name of one of the Bukharan envoys [3]. Furthermore, another decree from 1590 reports an incident at the Isakçı (Isaccea) wharf involving pilgrims from Bukhara. It states that servants of the Voivode of Moldavia (Bogdan) forcibly seized the two daughters and one son of Sheikh Aziz, as well as their property (horses, oxen, and other belongings). According to the resulting decree, the perpetrators were to be identified, arrested, and sent to Istanbul, while the victims' property and belongings were strictly ordered to be restored to their owners [15]. This document demonstrates that the Ottoman State protected the rights of not only political envoys but also Muslim pilgrims (hujjaj) on their journey for the Hajj.

The matters of the Hajj (pilgrimage) also hold a distinct position. Turkistani pilgrims primarily chose the route passing through Ajdarkhan (Astrakhan) to perform their pilgrimage. The primary reason for this was the hostile relations between the Shaybanids and the Safavids in the 16th century. Although the route through Khorasan and Iran was more convenient, the pressures exerted by the Safavids on Sunnis prevented pilgrims from utilizing this path. Specifically, in 1567, pilgrims from Samarkand, Bukhara, and other parts of Turkistan, having performed their Hajj, requested assistance from the Ottoman government to return to their countries via the Crimean Khanate and Astrakhan. Consequently, the Ottoman Sultan issued a decree to ensure the safe arrival of Turkistani pilgrims in Astrakhan and to provide them with necessary aid along the way [5]. Furthermore, a special decree was issued to ensure that Sheikh Zangi, a descendant of Sheikh Ahmad Yasawi, and his dervishes faced no obstacles during their journey to Mecca and Medina [6]. The primary objective of the Ottoman State's patronage of Turkistani pilgrims was, on the one hand, to strengthen mutual ties with the Turkistan Khanates and, on the other, to practically demonstrate the Sultan's status as the "Caliph of all Muslims."



## CONCLUSION

Documents concerning the history of Turkistan preserved in the Ottoman Archives hold a distinct position as vital primary sources for studying the history of Central Asia. In terms of their content and scope, these records encompass information on political-diplomatic relations, military cooperation, economic ties, trade processes, legal matters, as well as data pertaining to Hajj pilgrimages. This wealth of information enables a more comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted relations between the Turkistan Khanates and the Ottoman State across various sectors.

Furthermore, Ottoman archival materials provide the opportunity to examine the broad spectrum of political strategies and diplomatic correspondence between the two regions. Through these documents, the position held by the Turkistan Khanates in the international political arena of their time, their foreign policy orientations, and their mutual interests with the Ottoman State become increasingly clear.

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