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Research Article

THE BATTLE OF MERV AND ITS IMPORTANCE

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the political situation in the Middle East in the first decade of the 16th century and the increasing tension between the two political powers in this region - Shaybani Khan, the ruler of Turan, and Ismail Safavi, the ruler of Iran. The battle of Merv between the two countries and its causes, the factors of Shaybani Khan's defeat, and the political situation in Central Asia as an aftermath of the battle will be analyzed.

KEYWORDS

Source, 1509-1510, Shaybani Khan, Shah Ismail, Herat, Iran, Movarounnahr, Khorasan, Herat, Merv, Mahmudi, battle, sultan, Ubaydullah Khan, defeat, army, ambassador.

INTRODUCTION

During the collapse of the state of Turan, which was ruled by the Timurid dynasty, the Shaybanids led by Muhammad Shaybani Khan reunited this state piece by piece. In 1507, Shaybani Khan's occupation of the center of Khorasan brought the borders of his state to the lands of the Safavid Empire, which had emerged in Iran. Shaybani Khan's next strategic plan was Iran, followed by the Arabian Peninsula. As a result, he started preparing for a campaign against Iran.

Meanwhile, the failure of the Safavids' diplomatic negotiations with the Shaybanids, the conquest and the looting of the eastern cities of Iran by the Uzbek sultans forced Ismail Safavi to start a military campaign against Khorasan. In historical sources, this campaign, which ended with a victory over the Shaybani near Merv, is known as the Battle of Merv.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article used scientific research methods such as historicity, systematization, comparative, statistical, problem-chronological, and interdisciplinary approaches, as well as the principles of objectivity.

The political situation of the parties on the eve of the battle. After that (in the spring of 1510), Muhammad Shaybani led an army against the Hazara and Nakudar peoples who lived in the Garmsir and Zamindovar mountains of Khorasan. However, these marches did not bring success for the Uzbeks. At that time, Shah Ismail received the ambassador sent by Shaybani Khan. After getting acquainted with the letter of Khan, Shah sent a reply with the following content: "If it was necessary for every son to be engaged in the profession of his father, then all people must become prophets because they are the descendants of Adam, peace be upon him. If kingship were meant to pass to a child as an inheritance, then it would not have passed from Peshdadi to Kayoni. Look at how Genghis won the kingdom and how you won it." In response to Shaybani Khan's gifts, Shah Ismail gave him a wheel and a duk (a stone on the head of a spindle - A.Z.) and added the following words to the letter: "Now, I will tie the battle belt around my waist against you, and put my foot on the battlefield without any hesitation. If you challenge me, our disputes will be settled on the battlefield. If you don't oppose me, then keep spinning the wheel that I sent" [4:349].

By the time this letter arrived (October-November 1510), Shaybani Khan had dispersed his entire army and was relaxing in the garden of Jahonoro near Herat. At that time, news spread that Ismail Safavi, the king of Iran, was coming from Iraq and Azerbaijan to Khorasan. Shaybani Khan did not think that the war with Iran would happen this year, so the Shaybanid sultans were allowed to return to their estates in Movarounnahr with their armies. In addition, it was the

right time for Shah Ismail, who was closely following Shaybani Khan's military actions, to march on Khorasan and Shaybani Khan himself. Because Ismail Safavi knew that Shaybani Khan's son Muhammad Temur Sultan (d. 1514) was sent to Eastern Turkestan to capture Kashgar, and Shaybani Khan himself returned to Herat after unsuccessful campaigns in the mountainous regions of Khorasan and Georgia. This situation in Khorasan was the perfect time for Ismail Safavi to start an attack to the east in October 1510.

Shah Ismail gathered a large army from Iraq, Persia, Arabia, Georgia, Kirman, and Azerbaijan to march on Khorasan. After a short time, the troops of Ismail Safavi arrived in Damgan. Ahmed Sultan, the son-in-law of Shaybani Khan, who was a viceroy there, did not resist the Safavids and fled to Movarounnahr. Shaybani Khan's deputy in Astarabad, Khoja Ahmad, also behaved in the same way. Residents of Damgan, Astrabad, and Bistom districts were urged to remain loyal to Ismail Safavi to prevent looting [8:53].

After driving out the Uzbek garrisons scattered in various places in the western part of Khorasan, Ismail Safavi moved towards the central part of Khorasan. The Uzbek troops fled towards Herat, towards Bogi Shaybani Khan.

Shaybani Khan was very worried about Ismail Safavi's advance towards Mashhad. As mentioned above, Muhammad Shaybani Khan had just returned from an unsuccessful and tiring trip to the mountainous regions of Khorasan, Georgia, and Ghur, so it was obvious that his physically tired and mentally crushed little army (about 12-20 thousand, according to the analysis of sources) could not resist a huge, powerful Safavid army (about 40-60 thousand). Therefore, Shaybani Khan sent messengers to Movarounnahr and Khoraz and ordered Shaybanid sultans to come with an army. Leaving his relative and commander Jonvafo Mirza in

Herat, he arrived at the Merv fortress in early November of 1510 [5:117]. After some time, Jonvafo Mirza also left Herat and joined Shaybani Khan. Here, the khan, aiming to organize a defensive battle, strengthens the city's fortress.

Knowing that Shaybani Khan had fled from Herat, Ismail Safavi marched from Mashhad to Merv and sent his ambassador Donmuhammad Sultan Shamlu to Sarakhs. Shaybani Khan was aware of this and sent a selected group of soldiers under the command of Jonvafo Mirza to meet them. In a fierce battle near the village of Tahirabad, Donamuhammad was killed, but despite this, the Safavid soldiers chased the Uzbek warriors up to Merv [9:1198].

Negotiations near Merv, siege. On November 22, 1510, Ismail Safavi surrounded Merv with his main forces. He did not think that the self-confident Shaybani Khan would deploy his troops outside the Merv fortress.

According to the work "Olamoroyi Safavi", there were battles near the castle for three days, the besiegers entered the gates of the castle, and the defenders chased them out as much as possible. On the fourth day, Ismail Safavi wrote a letter to Shaybani Khan with the following content: "Khan of Turkestan, tell me: where is your pride and high flight, you told us that you want to visit Mecca as a ruler and repair the bridges. Men and kings should not go back on their word, as it is a shame. ... Get out of the fort, or my fearless warriors will conquer it with patience" [7:298]. Shaybani Khan replied to Shah Ismail through the ambassador, "You have found a favorable opportunity. Our army was attacked while in Turkestan. Everyone knows how to make a profit. Fighting will be different. If you stay here for two months or at least forty days (you are a man), I will believe that you are the son of a sheikh" [7:299].

In this situation, the strained relationship between Shaybani Khan and the sultans served as an advantage for the Safavids. According to the work "Olamoroyi Safavi", Elbarskhan in the service of Shaybani Khan (he was the son of Sultan Berka, who was killed in the 80s of the 15th century as a result of fighting with Shaybani Khan in Dashti Kipchak, and was the first ruler of the khanate established in Khorezm in 1512-1514 - A.Z.) secretly negotiated with Shah Ismail. According to the source, on the twenty-first day of the siege of the Merv fortress (November 22, 1510), the ambassador of Bars Elkhan (Elbars), the king of Khowar (Khorezm), came to Ismail Safavi and handed the letter to the Shah. In this letter, Elbars wrote, "Shaybani Khan appealed to me for help with his troops along with Muhammad Temur Sultan (son of Shaybani Khan, d. 1514) and Ubaydullah Khan (nephew of Shaybani Khan, 1487-1540). He also wrote that Muhammad Temur had crossed the Amudarya with Sultan, they were all gathering in Balkh, and the twenty thousand troops of Jonibek Sultan (Shaybani Khan's cousin, 1529) were coming to join him, and he said, "It would be better if you get rid of Shaybani Khan" before everyone reaches their aid [1: 40].

It is obvious that in Dashti Kipchak, Movarounnahr, Khorezm, and Khorasan, Shaybani Khan became more powerful year by year in the process of restoring a single state. The children of Berka Sultan, a distant relative of Shaybani Khan, who was executed in the aftermath of the struggles of the 1480s, out of desperation served Shaybani Khan, who was more powerful than they were, and looked for a way to take revenge on him when a favorable opportunity arose. Therefore, Shah Ismail's march to Khorasan might have been that opportunity for Elbars Khan.

Ismail Safavi, upon receiving a letter from Elbars Khan, convened a military council and advised that a decision

should be made, taking into account the arrival of the Shayban sultans in Merv within a week. The fact is that the Safavids did not have special weapons and equipment to break down the wall to capture the Merv fortress. Ismail Safavi decided to take advantage of the despair of the Uzbek Khan. That is why he was looking for a way to get Shaybani Khan out of the fortress by tricking him.

According to the sources, Ismail Safavi ordered his secretaries to write a letter to Shaybani Khan. He writes the following letter on behalf of his brother Ibrahim Mirza: "The Romanians under the leadership of Sultan Salim ibn Sultan Bayazid came to Tabriz with 120 thousand troops and we headed towards the city of Ardabil" [7:306]. On the orders of Ismail Safavi, the commanders of Kizilbash warriors spread this false information to their soldiers, and the Safavid army gathered all their tents and started loading them on camels. Ismail Safavi knew that Shaybani Khan's spies would be aware of this and on December 1, 1510, he suddenly ordered his troops to retreat [9:1199]. Before retreating, he wrote a letter to Mohammad Shaybani Khan with the following content: "You promised to meet in Iraq and Azerbaijan, but you did not keep your word. We kept our promise and went to Khorasan, we told you about our intention to visit the tomb of Imam Ali ibn Musa al-Reza in Mashhad, but you did not come to our meeting. Currently, some questions have arisen in Azerbaijan, and one day we will return. That is why we are leaving, but we are ready to fight you whenever you wish" [3:88; 9:1200].

Shah Ismail used this trick so skillfully that if this trick had not worked, if Shaybani Khan had not left the fortress, then this battle was destined to be postponed until spring. Because of that, Shah Ismail was told to return the army to Azerbaijan and the only decision was made at the main military conference, but in a

secret conference with a small number of his most trusted generals, it was agreed to withdraw three farsakhs (about 20-24 km) from Merv and keep the army ready for battle. Even when the Safavid army stopped at the settlement of Mahmudi, located three farsakhs from the Merv fortress, most of the Iranian generals did not know the purpose of their halt [9:1199]. The main purpose of this was to prevent the secret of the military trick from being revealed.

Beginning of the Battle of Merv. Reasons for King Ismail's victory. It was natural for Muhammad Shaybani Khan, who was the most powerful ruler in the Middle East and considered himself worthy of such an honor, to feel ashamed while hiding in the fortress. He also intended to attack the Iranian soldiers at an opportune moment. Shaybani Khan ordered his soldiers to pursue the Iranian army, and by doing so, the Uzbek Khan wanted to restore his disgraced honor and organize a massacre of the enemy.

According to Mirza Muhammad Haydar, Shaybani Khan's generals, such as Amir Qambar and Amir Roy, told the khan not to leave the fort, that Ubaydullah Sultan and Temur Sultan would arrive if he were patient for one more day, that they were close to Merv by a farsakh and each had 20,000 troops. It was emphasized that the real situation of the Iranian army (for instance, whether they really returned or it was a ruse) will be known. Then Shaybani Khan said, "The war with him (Ismail) is a great battle for faith. At the same time, this battle also brings great trophies, and there is no need to involve other sultans in this useful and beneficial work for this world and the hereafter. It is necessary to be brave" [4:350], so he strictly ordered his commanders to leave the fortress.

Ismail Safavi ordered Amirbek Mavsullu with 300 cavalry to wait for the enemy at the bridge at Murghab

leading to Mahmudabad, and he headed with the main force towards the fortress of Talkhton [9:1201].

Shaybani Khan accepted the above-mentioned letter of Ismail Safavi and gave an order to arrest Ismail and his ambassador. Being deceived by Shah Ismail's fake retreat, without waiting for the arrival of the Uzbek army from Movarounnahr, he left the Merv fortress with his troops and began to fight with the Safavis. According to Ismail Safavi's plan, the troops of Amirbek Mavsullu, who were left near the bridge, were to flee from the battles and pretend to be refugees, and the Uzbek troops should cross the bridge. Shaybani Khan saw that the Safavid vanguard army was not fighting him, and when he learned that the bridge leading to Murghab had been destroyed and that the Safavid

army had closed a circle that was fatal to the Uzbek Shaybanids, he realized that he became a victim of Ismail Safavi's military tactics [9:1201].

The commanders of the left and right wings of the Shaybanid army, Jonvafo Mirza and Qanbarbek, rushed to the attack and quickly squeezed the flanks of the Iranian troops.

Thus, Ismail Safavi's military-strategic plans began to unfold. The units of the Iranian forces in this war were led by the famous Kizilbash - Najmi Soni, Bayrambek Karamanli, Devsultan Rumlu, Husayni Begullah, Dudabeg, Dormonkhan, Shamlu, Amirbeg Mavsunllu, Muhammad Sultan Talish, Badinchan Sultan Talish, Zaynul Sultan Shamlu [8:58].



Shah Ismail is surrounding the army of Shaybanids

Relatively detailed information about this battle is given in Khondamir's "Habib us-siyar" and Muhammad Haydar's "Tarixi Rashidi" [9:1200-1204]. The analysis of

the data in these sources shows that Shaybani Khan's defeat was caused by the following factors.

Firstly, as a result of the fruitless march against the Kazakh Khanate in 1509 with no end in sight, which led to neither victory nor defeat, the marches to Khorasan and the northeastern regions of Iran, the morale of the army fell, they were exhausted, and they were sent away with the approach of winter. Secondly, during the siege of Merv, Shaybani Khan fell on the trick of Ismail Safavi [2], took the army out of the fortress, and chased after the enemy. Shaybani Khan's rapid actions were caused by falling to the false news of Ismail's ambassador, who met Shaybani Khan on the road and declared that the Shah was returning to Iran. Thirdly, he was deceived by military tricks during the battle itself: 1) 2-3 rows of camels were lined up behind the

Iranian army, and Muhammad Shaybani saw the camels behind the opponent's army from the hill, but did not pay attention to them [6]. In fact, Shah Ismail had placed the best horsemen behind the camels; 2) with the start of the battle, the heart (center) of the Iranian soldiers fought a little and retreated. The center of Shaybanid forces pursued them and began taking trophies. In such a situation, the Iranian cavalry behind the line of camels attacked, dispersed the wing parts of Movarounnahr's army, penetrated inside, and surrounded the heart (center) of Shaybani's army. Shaybani Khan, who was behind, was separated from his main army and was forced to flee.

The battle of Merv between Shaybani Khan and Shah Ismail



Miniature, depicted on the walls of Chilustun in Isfakhan

Shaybani Khan's army was defeated and many Uzbek commanders were killed. After the Uzbek army dispersed, people close to Ismail Safavi started looking for Shaybani Khan. He, along with 500 special soldiers

and servants, escaped from the pursuit of the Kizilbash and hid on a farm. According to Khondamir's work "Habib-us-siyar", while Shaybani Khan was desperately trying to find a place to get out of the garden, a group

of Kizilbash led by Burun Sultan, one of Shah's emirs, surrounded the garden and covered the Uzbeks with the rain of arrows. Uzbeks fell on top of each other from the arrows, and many were killed under the hoofs of horses. Some of them would climb over the garden wall by stepping on the corpses of their dead comrades, but they too would fall under the sword of the Kizilbash. After all the remaining Uzbeks were killed on the battlefield, "several high-ranking officials

searched for Muhammad Shaybani Khan among the dead and found him under the corpses in that garden. Khan was trapped under the fugitives who fell on him, and because of suffocation, he surrendered his life to the receiver of spirits. They separated his ... head from his body, took it to the glorious Shah, and threw it under the hooves of the horse that roams the world" [9:1204].

Reasons for Shaybani Khan's defeat in the Battle of Merv

- Physical and moral exhaustion of Shaybani Khan's army;
- Shaybani Khan himself was the initiator of the war;
- The small number of Shaybani Khan's army;
- Conflicts between Shaybani Khan and Shaybanid sultans;
- Shah Ismail's awareness about Shaybani Khan's internal policy;
- Shah Ismail's relations with Elbats Sultan;
- Battle tactics and Shah Ismail's trick.

Military and political results of the battle. Many military commanders of the country, such as Jalaluddin Mahmud, Muizuddin Husein, Jonvafo Mirza, Qanbarbek, were captured and executed near Merv. According to the "Ahsan al-Tavorikh", more than 10 thousand supporters of Shaybani Khan were killed in this battle, according to the work of "Olamoroyi Safavi", 28 thousand Shaybanids were killed, including 400 Genghis Sultans [8:59]. Muhammad Haydar Mirza wrote that he had never heard of such a battle in history where all the commanders in the army were killed [4:350].

Shah Ismail alleviated the problems associated with the material support of his army by dividing the conquered wealth and property among military

commanders and soldiers. He ordered Dudabek to form the government of Merv.

The Shaybani's defeat at the Battle of Merv disappointed his allies, including the Ottoman Turks and the governor of Mozandaran, Rustam Ruzafzun. On Ismail Safavi's order, the Khan's scalp was shaved, stuffed with straw, and sent as a "gift" to Shaybani Khan's ally, Sultan Bayazid Osmani [8:60].

Mazandaran was under constant attack by Shaybani and Safavid armies. The governor of Mazandaran, Rustam Ruzafzun, was sure that it was impossible to resist two armies. Thus, he openly supported Shaybani Khan. Ismail Safavi presented Shaybani Khan's severed hand to Rustam Ruzafzun and wrote, "Since your hand did not touch Shaybani Khan's feet, we will send his hand to your feet." The Tajik scientist Seyedaliakbar

Hosseinishirazi, relying on the work "Jahonkushoi Khaqan" by an unknown author, sent Muhammad Shaybani's left hand to Zahiriddin Babur and said, "If Shaybani Khan shortened your arm from Samarkand, then with the grace of the Almighty God, we shortened his arm and sent it to you." It is a little difficult to verify the authenticity of this information. Because such "gifts" were sent to the rulers of Kabul and Mozandaran only in the work "Jahonkushai Khaqan", whose author is unknown. It was not verified by historians such as Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur (even

though "Baburnama" does not contain pages that depict the 1510s, Babur would have mentioned such important information in other sources), Ghiyasiddin Khondamir and Muhammad Haidar, who directly participated in the historical events of that period.

After the conquest of Khorasan, Dudabek was appointed the governor of Merv, and Husein Begullah was appointed the governor of Herat. Ghiyasiddin Muhammad was tasked with the administration of courts in Khorasan.

Consequences of the Battle of Merv

Khorasan and Khorezm were annexed by Safavids. Amudarya was set as a borderline.	Khorasan turned into a main zone of military-political conflicts.	A century-long period of military-political conflicts between Shaybanids and Safavids began.	Ubaydulla Khan led his army against Khorasan and Iran 6 times; Abdul Mumin avenged his ancestor from the same dynasty.	Changes occurred in the foundations of dynastic rule in Movarounnahr.
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Thus, the battle of Merv, the victory in Khorasan, and the conquest of the lands of Eastern Iran by Shah Ismail Safavi became one of the brightest moments of the Iranian state and political life at the beginning of the 16th century. The victory at Merv can be considered the political foundation for the process of establishing the independence of Iran during the Safavid period. Ismail Safavi strengthened the centralized power in Iran by conquering the most important region - Khorasan. At the beginning of the 16th century, the annexation of Khorasan by Ismail Safavi became one of the most

important ways to create a unified state in the territory of Iran, based on the Shiite stream of Islam.

The battle of Merv again divided the state, which had been united under a single banner and consisted of Movarounnahr, Khorasan, and Khorezm, into three parts. As a result, throughout the 16th century, the region became a place where the struggle between the Shaybanids, the Safavids, and partly the Baburis and the Arabshahis raged.

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