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| **A Reformist Mongol Governor in China: Sayyid Ajall Shams al-Din Omar Bukhari (607-678 / 1211-1279)[[1]](#footnote-1)** **Çin’de Reformist Bir Moğol Valisi: Seyyid Ecel Şemseddin Ömer Buharî (607-678 / 1211-1279)**  **Submission Type:** Research Article **Received-Accepted:** 22.12.2023 / 25.04.2024 **pp.** 30-42 |

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| **Journal of Universal History Studies (JUHIS) • 7(1) • June • 2024 •**  **Derya Coşkun**  Erzurum Technical University, Department of History, Associate Professor Dr., Erzurum, Türkiye.  **Email**: derya.coskun@erzurum.edu.tr **Orcid Number**: 0000-0001-7161-5430 |

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| **Abstract**  Throughout history, there have been many politicians whose names are remembered and often recognized for their achievements in battles. We have come to know some of them closely due to their administrative initiatives. However, politicians who have made a name in every field are rare. One of these rare figures is Sayyid AjallShams al-Din Omar Bukhari, who gained fame for his reforms and the spread of Islam in China. Indeed, we are familiar with many politicians mainly for their war successes. However, those who have left their mark on the dusty pages of history in various fields are indeed rare. One such figure is Sayyid AjallShams al-Din Omar Bukhari, who made a name for himself with his reforms and the spread of Islam in China in the 12th century. This significant personality, who succeeded in bringing Islam to China in the mid-12th century, began to serve the Mongols after the capture of Bukhara by Genghis Khan in the year 616/1220. Due to his administrative abilities and knowledge of languages, Shams al-Din Omar attracted the attention of the Mongol Khans and was appointed as the governor of Yunnan. The reforms he implemented there quickly gained the love and acceptance of the people. The sympathy he gained facilitated the rapid spread of Islam in these lands. In this context, the article will focus on the identity, reforms, and contributions of Sayyid AjallShams al-Din Omar Bukhari, who is claimed to be from the lineage of the Prophet to the process of the spread of Islam in China.  **Keywords:**China, Islam, Yuan Dynasty, Kublai Khan, Bukhara. |

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| **Öz**  Tarih boyunca adından söz ettiren nice devlet adamları vardır ki onları genellikle savaşlardaki başarılardan dolayı tanırız. Kimisini de idari anlamdaki atılımları dolayısıyla yakından tanıma imkânı bulmuşuzdur. Oysaki her alanda adını tarihin tozlu sayfalarına yazdıran devlet adamları oldukça nadirdir. Bunlardan biri de hiç şüphesiz gerek reformları gerekse Çin’de İslamiyet’i yayması noktasında adından söz ettiren Seyyid Ecel Şemseddin Ömer Buharî’dir. İslamiyet’i XII. yüzyılın ortalarında Çin’e taşımayı başaran bu önemli şahsiyet, 616/1220 yılında Cengiz Han’ın Buhara’yı ele geçirmesiyle beraber Moğollara hizmet etmeye başlamıştır. Yönetim konusundaki yeteneği ve bildiği diller dolayısıyla Moğol hanlarının dikkatini çeken Şemseddin Ömer, Yunnan şehrine vali olarak atanmıştır. Burada gerçekleştirmiş olduğu reformlar, halk tarafından kısa sürede sevilip kabul görmesini sağlamıştır. Onun kazandığı bu sempati, İslamiyet’in bu topraklarda kısa sürede yayılmasına olanak sağlamıştır. Bu bağlamda makale, peygamber soyundan olduğu iddia edilen Seyyid Ecel Şemseddin Ömer Buharî’nin kimliği, reformları ve Çin’de İslamiyet’in yayılım sürecine katkılarını konu edinecektir.  **Anahtar Kelimeler:** Çin, İslamiyet, Yuan, Kubilay,Buhara. |

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| **Extended Abstract**  Sayyid Ajall Shams al-Din Omar al-Bukhari, born into a family from Bukhara, drew the constant attention of the Mongol Khans due to his unique circumstances, such as coming from a bureaucratic family and being proficient in multiple languages. Bestowed with the title of Seyyid based on the claim of being descended from Prophet Muhammad, Shams al-Din Omar was honored with the title of Excellency for his services in China, garnering praise for his accomplishments. It is evident that Shams al-Din Omar’s sons also served the Mongols. Having declared his allegiance to Genghis Khan and his family and being appointed as the governor of Yunnan, Shams al-Din Omar became a significant turning point in Chinese history. His compassionate and generous behavior towards the local people, especially in Yunnan, earned him the love and admiration of the populace, regardless of the city he served. The crucial question here is how Shams al-Din Omar’s earned affection among the people endured even after his death, as the prolonged remembrance of statesmen in the regions they governed is a rare occurrence. However, this was a common phenomenon for Shams al-Din Omar. His humane qualities, such as not harming life and property, following a tolerant policy by respecting beliefs, likely played a crucial role in earning unconditional love from the people. This humane aspect, associated with Islam, prompted sincere interest and even facilitated the significant spread of Islam in China. Shams al-Din Omar, by implementing various reforms for the prosperity of the people, opened up safe areas for farmers and traders by digging water channels, reducing taxes to manageable levels, and constructing mosques for those who embraced Islam. He supported farmers by promoting their produce, decreasing taxes to ensure the viability of agriculture, and establishing a network of stations to protect trade routes and caravans. Shams al-Din Omar took measures to bridge the gap by connecting trade routes with other provinces, applying tax reductions for foreign traders, and supporting the domestic trade sector. He engaged in serious reforms in various fields and supported agriculture by introducing new crops and advanced farming methods. Pioneering the establishment of regional markets and the regulation of a new currency, Shams al-Din Omar significantly contributed to the region’s economy by supporting the exploitation of mines in Yunnan. Introducing Islam to the Chinese people, he supported philosophy and facilitated the establishment of Confucian schools and the distribution of Confucian classics in Yunnan. In summary, Shams al-Din Omar emerged as a bureaucrat who enjoyed benefiting the people he governed, earning the populace's love. Therefore, even after his death, he continued to be remembered and honored for his kindness and achievements. Due to his reforms and innovative approach, Shams al-Din Omar, who left lasting effects on the people of Yunnan and its surroundings, has become a significant figure in forming Islamic infrastructure in China. Therefore, he has been memorialized for centuries and continues to be remembered. The reason for his unforgotten status undoubtedly stems from being loved by nearly every segment of the population. Under his governance, he succeeded in maintaining a tolerant administrative system that brought together people from diverse linguistic, religious, and racial backgrounds. |

**Introduction**

The founder of the Mongols, Genghis Khan, captured Bukhara on 4 Zilhicce 616/10 February 1220 as part of his policy to expand his territories, and subsequently, he burned and destroyed the city (Buell, 1979, p. 104-107; Liu, 2011, p. 80). Genghis Khan, who took many people as captives from Bukhara, preferred individuals with administrative and artisan identities to benefit from their skills. One of these captives who would become a key figure in future Mongol-Chinese relation is Sayyid AjallShams al-Din Omar (Zhijiu, 1993, p. 18-31). This individual, who entered Mongol service very young, achieved significant successes, perhaps influenced by his father’s administrative identity. In addition to being a successful administrator in battles, Sayyid AjallShams al-Din Omar al-Bukhari also had a reformist and economist identity, leading the spread of Islam in China. His qualities endeared him to the Chinese people, earning him appreciation and respect(www.dergipark.org.tr).

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Related to the administrative system, Shams al-Din Omar proposed the separate administration of counties to Han. By establishing a hierarchical independent administration system in terms of provinces and counties, he minimized the shortcomings in governance. His initial position was Daruga[[2]](#footnote-2) (Rachewiltz, 1993, p. 467-470), overseeing three small regions. During his tenure managing Yanjing, he became a critical friend of Mahmud Yalavach. Participating in many expeditions during Kublai Khan’s reign (Times, 10.07.1944 p. 15), in 1264, he was appointed as a political officer responsible for political affairs due to his administrative achievements and competence. Shams al-Din Omar and Liu Su became two of the most competent financial administrators of the Kublai era (Yuan Shi, 1996, p. 19, 83). Shams al-Din Ajall played a significant role in shaping China’s future administrative institutions and was the key figure in the spread of Islam in China (Arnold, 1913, p. 297).

Shams al-Din Omar, serving as an Islamic patron in the region, converted some Buddhist temples into mosques as the number of Muslims increased. This move is considered the first step of Islam in the region. Ibn Battuta, in his travelogue mentioned, *“On one side of the city (Canton) was a quarter belonging to Muslims, with large mosques, monasteries, and markets.”* In all Chinese cities, there was a Sheikh-ul-Islam responsible for Muslim affairs and a judge to settle disputes among them (Ibn Battuta, 2013, p. 619). From the last quarter of the 13th century onwards, Muslim migrations to China for approximately a century significantly increased the Muslim population there[[3]](#footnote-3). The migrating individuals served important roles among the Mongols in China, including governors, judges, tax collectors, scholars, and physicians (BCA, A25/030.01.0.0/17.212.1.).

The Neo-Assyrian period typically begins in 934 BC with the reign of Ashur-dan II (934-912 BC) and ends with the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. (Sayılı, Karal et al., 1978, p. 18). The Assyrians, who entered a period of ascendancy with Ashur-dan's ascension to the throne, took significant steps towards becoming a mighty empire with Ashurnasirpal II and became one of the most powerful states of the Near East. Transformed into a world empire during the reign of the Sargonids, Assyria experienced its military and economic peak (Dezső, 2011, pp. 13-16; Groß, 2020, pp. 39-41; Gökçek, 2015, pp. 122-215; Akyüz and Toptaş, 2020, p. 195).

**Table 1:** Foreign Nobles Taken Hostage and Captive by Assyria

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| **Ruler** | **Homeland** | **Identity** | **Situation** | **Document Number** |
| Adad-nerari II | Naʾiri lands | Uncertain | Hostage | RIMA 2 A.0.99.2: 30-33 |
| Adad-nerari II | Temannu | Muquru, Temannite ruler, his brothers, his wives, his sons and his daughters | Hostage | RIMA 2 A.0.99.2: 57b-60a |
| Adad-nerari II | Temannu | Nūr-Adad of the land Temannu, | Captive | RIMA 2 A.0.99.2: 80 -81 |
| Tukulti-Ninurta II | Nairi lands | The wives and daughters of an unnamed ruler of the city Ki[...] | Captive | RIMA 2 A.0.100.5 :1-3 |
| Ashurnasirpal II | Nirbu | The sons of land Nirbu | Hostage | RIMA 2 A.0.101.1: ii 7b-12a |

Reference:British Museum BM 124802. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

*“After Yakīn-Lû, the king of the land Arwad, had gone to (his) fate, Azi-Baʾal, Abī-Baʾal, (and) Adūnī-Baʾal, the sons of Yakīn-Lû who reside in the middle of the middle of the sea, came up from the middle of the sea, (ii 80) came with their substantial audience gift(s), and kissed my feet. I looked upon Azi-Baʾal with pleasure and installed (him) as king of the land Arwad. I clothed Abī-Baʾal (and) Adūnī-Baʾal in garment(s) with multi-colored trim (and) placed gold bracelets (around their wrists). I made them stand before me.”* (RINAP 5/1 no. 3: ii 75-86a)

**Conclusion**

Sayyid Ajall Shams al-Din Omar Bukhari emerged as a governor who left lasting impacts on China's administrative, political, and religious life. Although he fulfilled his duties as a governor, his reforms and achievements are the most precise indicators that he was more than just a governor. Shams al-Din Omar’s extraordinary character, knowledge of languages, and generous nature quickly caught the attention of the Mongol Khans, and his significant positions while serving the Mongols were not a coincidence. Shams al-Din Omar was recognized not only as the governor of Yunnan under his rule but also as the father of all Muslims in China. What makes Shams al-Din Omar important is his signature on significant reforms in administrative, social, and economic life. These reforms and the structures he introduced are still in use and continue in present-day China. Shams al-Din Omar, by preventing the damage caused by the Mongol army and benefiting from the acquired territories, put an end to the arbitrary practices of the soldiers and freed the army from civilian monopoly. Giving importance and support to education, he made significant strides in employment by opening Confucian schools and appointing teachers to these schools. Considering his achievements in almost every field, it is meaningful that he was greatly loved in the region where he served as governor. He succeeded in winning the people's affection in Yunnan and the entire Chinese geography, including Islam.

**NOTE: For articles on Ancient History, Archaeology, etc., the in-text citation should be as follows:**

In articles on Ancient History, Byzantine History, Archaeology, etc., the abbreviations in the Oxford Classical Dictionary [OCD] abbreviation list are followed in the text and in the bibliography. When citing Ancient, Late Antiquity and Byzantine authors and works, the classical citation order is followed. This abbreviation includes {Author}, (Work), [Chapter], [Paragraph and line].

Note: For authors, works, etc. that are not included in the Oxford Classical Dictionary abbreviation list, their full form should be indicated in the first footnote cited, and the preferred abbreviation should be indicated in parentheses in subsequent uses.

In-text Usage: Tac. *ann*. XV. 17.3.

Bibliography: Tac. *ann*. (= Text Used: Koestermann, Erich, (1968), Cornelius Tacitus, Annalen, erläutert und mit einer Einleitung versehen, Band IV: Buch 14-16, Carl Winter Verlag, Heidelberg.)

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**APPENDICES**

**Figure 1**: Frontal View of Woman Portrait Bust



Source: Individual Archive.

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   (These footnotes on the first page will remain as written. The author will not make any intervention here) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The term *daruga* (*daruha, darugachi, darugachin*), which appears in Persian texts, is derived from the Mongolian word *daruḫu*, meaning to press, *squeeze, narrow*, and *metaphorically* to seal. In Turkish, it is used as *yargan* or *baskak*, while in Arabic and Persian, it has the same meaning *shahna*. See (Yuvalı, 1993, p. 505-506) for more information; Chinese historian Xiu Ting described daruga as a title given to individuals dealing with civil affairs. For detailed information, see (Ting, 2012, p. 114); Also, refer to (Vásáry, 1976, p. 187-197) for its usage in the Golden Horde State.Formun Üstü [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. These mosques are Nancheng Mosque, Jinniujie Mosque, Shuncheng Mosque, Yongning Mosque, and Taoyuan Mosque. Of course, not all mosques were preserved, and most, including those near Wuhua Mountain, Yukesi Street, Yunjin Market, and Daximen, have been demolished. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)