

STEPPE RULERS AND THEIR DIPLOMACY IN THE XVIII-XIX CENTURIES

Albina MURATBEKOVA ¹

¹ Eurasian Research Institute, 050004 Almaty, Kazakhstan; e-mail:albina.muratbek@gmail.com; ORCID: 0000-0001-5908-6564

Klara Khafizova. *Steppe Rulers and Their Diplomacy in the XVIII-XIX Centuries.* KazISS, 2019. pp. 479.

Steppe diplomacy – is a topic that has been largely neglected in the studies of international relations. Since the state-building process is written predominantly in the sedentary lens of state, the steppe patterns of leadership, succession, and diplomatic relations are not considered under the studies of state politics. However, for the formerly nomadic nations as Kazakhstan, the study of steppe traditions and institutions, along with the interaction with both nomadic and sedentary nations is of high importance.

Therefore, the book of Klara Khafizova on the steppe rulers and diplomacy of the Kazakh khanate is a timely contribution to the burgeoning area of international relations in Kazakhstan. The book presents a new perspective of nomadic traditions while conducting interstate and intrastate politics. It also reveals unknown facts about steppe traditions and explains the nomadic system of international relations. Through the prominent figures in the history of Kazakh khanate, the author enables a novel explanation of the decision-making processes of steppe rulers and batyrs' (warriors) during the three generations of Kazakh rulers. It also illustrates a diverse and complex system of international relations of the Kazakh khanates while maneuvering between the Russians, Qing empires, and the Islamic world. The Islamic world, at that time, was represented by Kokand, Bukhara and Khiva khanates, Iran, and Turkey.

Acknowledging that the steppe traditions was not disappeared but hybridized into the contemporary nation-building process of Kazakhstan, the presented extensive analysis of steppe traditions reveals unknown pages of national history. The main argument of the book lies in illustrating the efforts of Kazakh rulers for territorial integrity and national unity during the XVIII-XIX centuries through the new dimension – diplomatic practices. Since the Kazakh historiography has limited publications dedicated to the role of diplomacy in the Kazakh khanate, the presented publication represents a highly valuable view on the Kazakh statehood and international relations.

In the introductory chapter, the author explains the international affairs of steppe during the late Kazakh khanate period and years of Russian accession, periodization of Kazakh diplomacy, diplomatic practices of khans, and sultans, including the young sultans and the value of Kazakh iconography. By doing so, the

author reveals the individuality of Kazakh rulers, their preferences and family relationship, their everyday life practices, the level of literacy and culture. The role of young sultans in the nomadic diplomatic practices was esteemed. Young representatives of noble families, official heirs were involved in diplomatic practices in youth and sometimes in adolescence. In addition to joining the military campaigns, the young nobles were involved in diplomatic missions, by participating in the diplomatic receptions and diplomatic stay in neighboring countries. The chapter explicitly portrays the mission of the institute of amanats for young heirs, by describing the importance of the mission of amanats in establishing relations with other states and in getting acquaintance with the peculiarities of a neighboring nation, including their mentality, culture, the political and administrative system, and economic practices. The chapter also points out that the clerical work during the Kazakh khanate was simpler compared to the period after the accession of Kazakhstan to Russia. In addition, a brief explanation is given on the languages for written and diplomatic practices, the role of religion, and livelihood practices of steppe establishment. Besides, the chapter highlights the need for further research on the appearance of Kazakh rulers, since the portraits of Kazakh rulers and ambassadors painted by the Western European, Russian and Chinese artists might be found in the archives and galleries of different countries, yet was not identified and comprehensively studied.

The first chapter “Traditional diplomacy of nomadic states” is devoted to scrutinizing the efforts of Kazakh rulers to preserve the Kazakh statehood during the XVIII-XIX centuries, in particular attempts of Abulmambet khan and Tole bi in dealing with external forces. The chapter explores the attempts of Chingizids (descendants of Zhengiz Khan) in leading, unifying, and preserving the khanate, while maneuvering between Russian and Qing Empires. During the decay of the Dzungar khanate, the attempts of Kazakh rulers to maintain their possessions – through the inherited nomadic traditional management enable understanding their methods, also through diplomatic negotiations with both Russian and Qing Empires. Abulkhair, Abulmambet, and Tole bi are prominent figures that along with unifying the power in their hands, managed the foreign affairs of Kazakh khanate since the 1730s. Their efforts are well described in the chapter.

The second chapter on the foreign policy of Abylai Khan, Vali, and Gubaidulla gives a further explanation of the international affairs of Kazakh rulers during the years of Russian accession. By assessing the politics and diplomacy of those rulers, the authors attempt to unpack the unknown pages of Kazakh history, in particular regarding the death of Abylai khan. While analyzing the international relations of Vali Khan and Gubaidulla, the chapter shows the diplomatic practices of Kazakh rulers in preserving the Kazakh statehood. The administrative control of the Russian Empire is also well described in the procedures of assignment of salary and honorarium of Kazakh khans and sultans.

The third chapter focuses on the diplomacy of Kazakh rulers after the liquidation of the Kazakh Khanate. The struggle for the restoration of the Khanate in the biographies of Kenesary Khan, descendants of Abylai Khan and other Chingizids demonstrates the situation in the steppe and political culture of Kazakhs. While describing the life of the prominent figures of the late XVIII century, the chapter provides a complex understanding of the development of Kazakh state after the Russian accession, both with the Russians and Chinese. Diplomatic

practices emphasized there, shows the legacy of steppe diplomacy.

The final chapter discusses the role of batyrs in maintaining diplomatic relations through embassy services. The chapter relies on the biographies of Kazakh batyrs as Kozhabergen, Kozhamergen, Berdikozha, Kabanbai batyr to name but few, which exemplify the role of batyrs in conducting political and economic diplomacy. As the author states, the Qing dynasty also revived the honor of batyr's that evidences the influence of the Turkic-Mongolian traditions. Apart from that, the author points out that both Kazakh and Chinese historiography needs further research on the identification of batyrs' by comparing historical facts and local narratives.

To sum up, international relations and foreign policy remain among the important indicators of statehood and sovereignty in the Kazakh khanate. Hence, the book of Prof. Khafizova is of great importance for the study of the formation of Kazakh statehood and foreign policy. The comprehensive perspective on international affairs during the XVIII-XIX centuries provides a deep understanding of the institute of Khanate, management styles, and peculiarities of steppe diplomacy. The book will be beneficial for all interested in Kazakh history. The book efforts to eliminate the existing gap of the literature on the evolution of the local school of diplomacy and foreign relations hence is advised for reading for a wider public interested in that.