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## **Historical Sciences**

# **FERGHANA IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES: POLITICAL AND ETHNIC PROCESSES**

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses the issue to what extent Ferghana valley, like other historical and cultural possessions as Sogd, Chach, Ustrushana, as a separate political entity played role in ethno-political processes that happened in Central Asia in the early middle ages, in particular, VI-VIII centuries. Basing on written sources in Chinese, Sogdian, Arabic and Persian, there has been disclosed that Ferghana in that period actively participated in the political procedures of the region, held close political and diplomatic relations not only with neighboring or close oasis political units like Chach and Sogd, but also with the largest empires of their time, such as the Turkic khaganate, China and Tibet.

**Keywords:** Middle Ages, Ferghana, political units, Turkic khaganate, Ashina dynasty, Tang China, Tibet, Arab conquest, ikhshid, čor.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Ferghana valley (north-eastern part of Uzbekistan), which was mentioned as “Ta-Yuan” in Chinese chronicles of the last quarter of last millennium b.c. and which is nowadays being referred as “Davan” in the Uzbek historiography, has been playing an active role in social-political and ethno-cultural processes of Central Asia from ancient times to the early middle ages. This historical-geographic region, which was called as “Parkana” in local languages in ancient times and “Ferghana” in the early middle ages, because of its natural geographic position, has been a busy place for intense mutual relationships between different tribes that had both settled and nomadic lifestyles. If we look through Ferghana’s history in the early Middle Ages, we can see how important role this area played in region’s political processes. Political events that occurred in Ferghana valley in the early Middle Ages were undoubtedly related to economic-cultural and ethnic situation of Central Asia. At that time, economic, cultural and ethnic situation in Central Asia and Ferghana was as follows:

Turkic-language ethnicities that lived in north and northeastern parts of Central Asia mainly consisted of nomadic, cattle-raiser clans and tribes. However, despite the fact that settled peasants lived in Ferghana, the language they spoke has not been fully confirmed. Due to some written information and materials regarding toponyms, one can assume the ancient population of Ferghana belonged to tukhar (tokhar) branch or eastern

Iranian branch of Indo-European language family.

It also indicates that turkic ethnicities have been living in Ferghana, especially in its northern and north-eastern parts since ancient times. In the early middle Ages, Turkic tribes mostly lived in Semirech'e and Sirdarya's middle parts (Chach/Tashkent, Otrar / Tarband valleys) and these regions were close neighbors of Ferghana.

Evidences of the immense role of Ferghana sovereignty in area's political life in the early middle ages, particularly in 7-8 ages, can be found in Chinese, Sogdian and Arabic-Persian sources (Khojaev A, 1973). especially, local rulers of Ferghana were involved in political events of Talas (Taraz / South-Eastern Kazakhstan – central part of the Kyrgyz republic) area, whose regions were controlled by Western Turkic khaganate (Khojaev A, 2013. p.45-46), in the same years, some rulers of Ferghana has set up intense political and diplomatic relations between Chach (Tashkent), Sogd and other sovereignties (Sogdian documents from the mountain of Mug. 1962.). Furthermore, political bonds between Eastern Turkic khaganate and Ferghana became stronger in the first half of 8<sup>th</sup> century (Babayar G. 2008. p.135-146.).

## II. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

At this point, some attention needs to be paid to the following issue. As you may know, Ferghana valley was annexed by Turkic khaganate in the years of approximately 560s and at that time valley nominally obeyed to Hephthalites as separate oasis kingdoms (valley sovereignty) (Anorboev A. 2001. p 56.). After Turkic khaganate, which was formed in the year of 552 in south-western slopes of alay mountains, attacked hephthalites in Chach valley and coasts of Sirdarya river during 560s (Bichurin N. Ya. 1950. p 229), valley sovereignties of Chach, Ustrushana, Bukhara, Sogd (Samarkand, Panch, Kesh, Nakhshab and others), as well as Ferghana, became the subjects of khaganate. While left wing of Turkic khaganate that included sunset parts of the country (Yettisuv /Semirech'e, Eastern Turkistan, area between Amu-darya and Sir-darya rivers Mawarannahr Transoksiana) was holding a status of merely independent state, Ferghana was also included into this western wing (western Turkic khaganate – years of 568-740) (Babayarov G. p 42).

Turkic khaganate (Eastern wing / Eastern Turkic khaganate – years of 552-630; 682-744), that was concentrating all of its attention on Mongolia, Southern Siberia, Northern China and Far East, was not interested in western wing's internal affairs. Eastern Turkic khaganate, which was defeated by china's tang dynasty in 630, has finally recovered itself in 682 and started interfering in political events of area between Amudarya and Sirdarya, particularly, in Ferghana valley. However, relationships between khaganate and Ferghana were set up mostly with western Turkic khaganate and these relations lasted from 560s to 740s. If we classify these relationships according to written information sources, the following historical view can be formed (we will separate them into these stages):

1. First stage. Turkic khaganate annexing Ferghana valley – 560s. During this period, local dynasties of the valley were paying contributions to khaganate as a vassal state and were quite independent in their internal affairs.

2. Second stage. Complete interference of Turkic khaganate into Ferghana valley is ruling order – end of 620s. After local governor's murder, representative of Ashina dynasty becomes the ruler of Ferghana; the formation of Ashina dynasty in the region.

3. Third stage. Increasing influence of china in Ferghana and the tang empire annexes western Turkic khaganate – end of 650s. In 657, the tang empire, which has already defeated western Turkic khaganate, tries to get under control regions between Amudarya and Sirdarya, as well as Ferghana valley, with the help of khaganate.

4. Fourth stage. Both wings of khaganate are trying to maintain intense relations with Ferghana – 690s. During this period, representatives of ashina dynasty in Ferghana are playing active role in political relations between western and eastern khaganates and attending in region's important processes.

Main political center of western Turkic khaganate was the city of suyab in semirech'e and this region's borders were linked to Ferghana valley (Bichurin N. Ya. 1950. p 258, 284). This factor has contributed a lot to intense relations between Ferghana and khaganate, rather than with other vassal states. Furthermore, western khaganate has set one of its administration centers in Chach valley (Khatamova M., 2009. p. 3-13.). As this region was very close to Ferghana, influence of khaganate was always very high in the valley. While rulers of Ferghana were on the side of western Turkic khaganate at the end of 7<sup>th</sup> century, they started maintaining active political relations with eastern khaganate and china during the second quarter of 8<sup>th</sup> century (Liu Mau-Tsai, 2006. p. 318, 542). As it has been analyzed in details below, it was dependent to various factors.

Ashina tuizhi (Bichurin N. Ya. 1950. p 294) (671-679), who has declared himself as a "Western Turkish khagan" and attacked china's military region in Eastern Turkestan, has formed an alliance with Tibet (Bichurin N. Ya. 1950. p 294). However, khaganate and Tibet's allied forces were defeated by chinese forces in 694 (Bichurin N. Ya. 1950. p 294).after this, his further activities were continued in Ferghana. At the end of 690s, commander of chinese forces kuo qien-quan receives an order to attack Ferghana and starts plundering the region. Soon people of Ferghana choose tuizhi as their leader and fight against chinese invaders under his command (Chavannes E., 2007. p 246-247). With the support of Ferghana people (Uray G., 1979. P281) and Tibet, he tries to conquer "four garrisons" in Eastern Turkestan and Semirech'e.

Political events that occurred in 738 in Talas valley has led to significant changes in region's political life. In this year, turgesh khaganate's supreme leader Suluk (Su-lu - 蘇祿) was killed by his own functionaries Baga tarkhan (Mo-huo ta-kan - 莫賀達干) and tamgači (ta-ma-chi - 都摩支). His son T'u-huo-hsien qut-čor (吐火仙 Ku-ch'u kağan - 骨啜可汗) is crowned after this and he starts ruling the country from city of Suyab. Besides, Er-beg tegin(er-wei tekin - 爾微特勒) from Kara Turgeshs is also crowned as khagan in talas. It leads to a war against Baga tarkhan (mo-huo tarkan). In 739, Baga tarkhan defeats khagan of Turgesh with the help of leading political figures like general Kai Chia-yun from Tang dynasty (蓋嘉運), governor of Chach Bahadur tudun (Mo-huo tu tu-tun - 莫賀咄吐屯) and ruler of Ferghana Arslan Tarkhan (拔汗那王 - A-hsi-lan ta-kan 阿悉爛達干). As a result, the emperor of Tang dynasty presents Talas and other cities that recently belonged to Turgesh khaganate, to the ruler of Ferghana (Khojaev A., 2013. P 44-45).

Chinese sources also emphasize that the governor of Talas city obeyed the ruler of Chach. In 750, commander Kao Hsien-chih (高仙芝) of An-xi garrison that belonged to Tang dynasty, invaded Chach in january of 751 with the excuse, according to which the ruler of Chach Bahadur tudun (Mo-huo tu tu-tun) (Smirnova O.I. 1981. P 431) did not fulfill demands as a vassal region. After decapitating the ruler of Chach, Commander Kao Hsien-chih sent his head to the emperor of Tang (Ekrem E., 2003. P 122-123). Son of the ruler of Chach – Čabiš (na-chu ch'e-pi-shih - 那俱車鼻施) asks for help from Arabs. Battle of talas between Abbasids and Tang dynasty in april of 751 ended with the crushing defeat of Chinese. After this, Chach becomes obedient region to arabs and Ferghana's northern areas keep their independence as well as maintaining close relations with China. For instance, Chinese chronicles with the content of "a princess of Tang dynasty (He-yi prenses - 和義公主) was married to the ruler of Ferghana. In 754, the ruler of Ferghana Chung-chieh (忠節), in order to learn about Chinese orders, sends his son Hsüeh-su (薛裕) to Tang empire, as well as reports about his obedience to tang dynasty. Emperor of Tang grants him the title "general of Tso wu-wei (左武衛將軍). He was known as the most loyal servant of Tang dynasty" prove this fact (Ekrem E., 2003. P 122-123).Some years before these events, Arab forces under the command of Kuteibe Ibn Muslim have invaded Ferghana in 715. After the defeat of local governor, he fled to Kucha (Eastern Turkistan) in order to ask for help. In the meanwhile, Arabs appointed a man called الطار (Alutar; A-leao-ta in Chinese chronicles) to rule over Ferghana as their representative (Smirnova O.I. 1981., P 255). 10 years later after these events, Chinese traveler Huei Chao who have visited Northern India, Kabul and Tokharistan in 726, mentions that there are 2 sovereignties in Ferghana, one is ruled by Tu-jue (Turks) in Sirdarya's northern areas, another one is controlled by Da-shi (Arabs) in south (Bernshtam A.N. 1952. p. 187-195.). Therefore, during Huei-chao's visit to Sirdarya, its northern parts belonged to Turks, while southern regions obeyed to Arabs. It is highly possible that Ashina dynasty, while south was controlled by Ferghana's ancient ruling dynasty ruled northern areas.

Even though nowadays it is difficult to find out exact forms of Arabic order in south Sirdarya and which regions of the valley were included to this administration from written information sources, we can imagine possible situation by comparing some information. Especially, information concerning political situation in Ferghana during 730-750 years (that were described in Chinese chronicles) proves that Turkic dynasty which has saved its authority in valley's northern areas, still had significant political influence over the whole region. It means that the power of Arabs in some areas like Chach, Sogd (Samarkand, Panch), Tokharistan and Ferghana was quite unstable and rebellions that were occurring in different regions were weakening Khalifate's political influence.

Especially, it was very difficult for arabs to keep their authority in quite distant regions like Ferghana and Chach. Furthermore, following two factors caused additional danger to Arab forces in these lands:

- 1) Closeness of this area to the central region of Western Turkic (568-740) and Turgesh khaganates (699-756) Semirech'e;
- 2) Ruling dynasties of both khaganates originated from western khaganate.

It is also possible that request of governors of Chach and other regions for political help (Bichurin N. Ya. 1950. P 314) from Chinese Tang dynasty frightened Arabs. However, we do not know exactly whether chinese empire helped them or not. However, unlike Tang dynasty, there is plenty of information about Turkic khaganates' assistance to Ferghana and Chach in military sphere.

It's written in sogdian sources that people of Ferghana played active role during the war of Turkic khaganate, Chach, Ferghana, Sogd, Tokharistan against Arab invasion. Sogdian document "b-17" of Mug Mountain mentions xwn "turkic" warlord (or camp) in Sogd and "Governor of Ferghana" by his side (Sogdian documents from the mountain of Mug. 1962.). This alliance was also mentioned in Arabic sources and it has lasted, with some breaks, till 740. They report that the person who united governors of Tokharistan, Bukhara, Sogd (Samarkand, Panjikent), Chach, Ferghana was "Khagan" ("Turkic khagan" or "Turkesh khagan") (Sogdian documents from the mountain of Mug. 1962.). Although exact names or nicknames of khagans that were emphasized in documents cannot be found out, we can make assumptions based on some documents.

Some researchers are of the opinion that "Turkic khagan" who fought against Arabs – he was mentioned, as "Abu Muzahim" ("father of the attackers") in Arabic documents – actually was khagan of Turgesh – Suluk khagan (died in 738). Information about several significant battles of this khagan against Arabs, how he united different sovereignties in the region and even reached Khorasan were given by Abu Jafar at-Tabari in his book "Tarikh al-rusul va-l-muluk" (Esin E. 1977. p. 324., 2006. P 324). Additional commentaries are required to the fact that precisely ruler of Ferghana (no other local governors) was mentioned along with Turkic khagan. In fact, the arrival of "ruler of Ferghana" with "khagan of khuns" to Sogd was written in Sogdian document "b-17" (Grenet F. 1989. p. 165–184.). Moreover, document "A-14" mentions "the letter (of Divashtich – Sogdian leader and governor of Panch) to khagan and ruler of Ferghana was delivered right into the hands of Ferghana, tutuq" (Sogdian documents from the mountain of Mug. 1962.). If we take into account the fact that political events described in the letter happened in early 720s, it becomes clear that intense political relations between khaganate and Ferghana were maintained precisely during these years. It is highly possible that high-ranked Ferghana official – tutuq resided in Chach and after leaving him as their loyal representative with the governor of Chach, khagan and ruler of Ferghana returned to their own administration centers. Sogdian ambassador Fathupharn who visited Chach and handed over the letter (addressed to khagan) to the tutuq of Ferghana, believed that this official or the ruler of Ferghana would deliver the letter straight to khagan.

Content of political events that occurred between 720 and 740 years show that rulers of Ferghana achieved great attention of khagans. This can be proved by the attendance of several valley governors in Suluk's (khagan of Turgesh) journey to Tokharistan in order to wipe out Arab forces from region in the early 730s (Klyashtorniy S. G. 1954. s. 54-65.). Attendance of Arslan Tarkhan (ruler of Ferghana) (Bichurin N. Ya. 1950.p 319) in political processes (struggle for the throne) of Semirech'e in the late 730s depended on other political events and people of Ferghana, incited by Chinese militarists, rise against new khagan Tukhosyan qut-chor. In exchange for this, Arslan Tarkhan Takes Taraz and other surrounding cities that have strategic importance to turgeshkhaganate, under his own protection.

During the last years of khaganate – 740s – bonds between khaganate and Ferghana were still strong. One of the Chinese sources – “Tsuang tang-wen” – mentions that in 741 Tu-jue (Turkic) khagan Bi-jia Ku-tu-lu (Bilga Kutlug) has sent a new year greeting to Chinese emperor and declared that he and ruler of Bohanna (Ferghana) from now on will assist emperor against his enemies (Liu Mau-Tsai, p 318, 542).

Based on the above, we can say:

Firstly, Ferghana valley was an important area of political and strategic value and many countries tried to conquer it;

Secondly, rulers of Ferghana valley had intense and close relations with such great countries as western Turkic khaganate and China;

Thirdly, countries that conquered Ferghana valley used their own administration orders, but relied on local families and dynasties after all;

Fourthly, people of Ferghana valley played an active role in the war against Arab invaders, fighting together with neighbor sovereignties.

### III. CONCLUSION

It shows that even though Ferghana obeyed Arabs in the first half of 8<sup>th</sup> century, Turkic dynasty that has saved its authority on Sirdarya's right coasts, gained significant power in 740s and started interfering in the policy of Yettisuv (Semirech'e) and Eastern Turkestan. Especially, it is notable that solidarity between rulers of Ferghana and Turkic khagans in distant Orkhun valley (Mongolia) has continued until the last years of khaganates. During those years, tens of sovereignties between Amudarya – Sirdarya rivers and other surrounding regions has lost their power (some of them ended their existence as dynasties) and obeyed to Arabs. It proves that one of the branches of Ashina dynasty was gripping reins of control tightly in Ferghana valley.

We can conclude that Ferghana that has played an active role in social-political and ethno-cultural processes of Central Asia in the early middle ages had unique place in both history and life of its neighbors Chach and Ustrushanas a separate valley state. Ruling dynasties of Ferghana have maintained political and diplomatic relations with not only close neighbors, but also with great and significant countries of that period like Turkic khaganate, Tibet and Tang empire.

There is no doubt that political and social process that happened in Central Asia has led to significant changes in ethnic and cultural life of Ferghana valley. Especially, Ferghana's obedience to Turkic khaganate and other Turkic political administrations, which lasted more than 150 years, made it possible to increase the amount of Turkic ethnicities that have been living in this region since ancient times. Furthermore, local people have accepted Muslim religion because of invasions of Arabic and Persian forces to the region in 8-9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Since this time, valley's ancient local language has lost its actuality and was replaced by Turkic and Farsi (Tajik) languages.

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## ФЕРГАНА В РАННЕМ СРЕДНЕВЕКОВЬЕ: ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ И ЭТНИЧЕСКИЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ

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### Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается вопрос о том, в какой степени Ферганская долина, как и другие историко-культурные владения, такие как Согд, Чач, Уструшана, как отдельное политическое образование играла роль в этнополитических процессах, происходивших в Центральной Азии в раннем средневековье, в частности, в VI-VIII вв. На основании письменных источников на китайском, согдийском, арабском и персидском языках было установлено, что Фергана в этот период активно участвовала в политических процессах региона, поддерживала тесные политические и дипломатические отношения не только с соседними или близкими оазису политическими единицами, такими как Чач и Согд, но и с крупнейшими империями своего времени, такими как Тюркский каганат, Китай и Тибет.

**Ключевые слова:** Средневековье, Фергана, политические единицы, Тюркский каганат, династия Ашина, Танский Китай, Тибет, арабское завоевание, ихшид, чар.

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