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THE POLICY OF SOVIETIZATION IN KHOREZM IN 1920–1930 AND ITS SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

Shakirova Mardona Maqsudbek qizi
Teacher of History, Khorezm Branch of the Asia International University
Email: mardonamaqsudovna@gmail.com

Abstract

This thesis examines how the policy of Sovietization was implemented in the territory of Khorezm between 1920 and 1930 and analyses its impact on political, social and cultural life. It traces the establishment of the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic, the gradual adaptation of local institutions of government to the Soviet political order, the national-territorial delimitation of 1924 and the processes that followed it. Particular attention is devoted to the consequences of Sovietization for the national intelligentsia and for local political figures, as well as to the formation of the instruments of political surveillance and repression that would later underpin mass persecution.

Keywords: Khorezm, Sovietization, Khorezm People's Soviet Republic, national intelligentsia, political repression, GPU, national-territorial delimitation, Soviet policy.

Introduction

The 1920s and 1930s constituted a period of abrupt political and social transformation in the history of Khorezm. In the early months of 1920 the Khanate of Khiva was abolished and a new form of political administration emerged in its place. On 30 April 1920 the formation of the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic was proclaimed. In the initial stage attempts were made to build a new system of state administration with the participation of local political forces. At the first congress of the republic a provisional constitution was adopted and the Council of People's Nazirs was established [1; 2].

During the first years of the republic's existence efforts were undertaken to carry out political, economic and social reforms. The internal political life of the republic, however, came under the steadily increasing influence of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. As a consequence, the capacity of local political forces to pursue an independent course narrowed, while the introduction of the Soviet political system accelerated [1].

For this reason, the study of Khorezm's history in 1920–1930 requires close attention to the process of Sovietization, to the attitude of that process towards local political forces, and to the origins of the repressive policy that took shape in the following decade. Such an enquiry carries considerable scholarly significance, since the administrative and legal mechanisms established in the 1920s became the direct preconditions of the mass persecutions of the late 1930s.

Methodologically, the present work relies on the principles of historicism and objectivity. Published documentary collections, encyclopaedic and archival materials, and the findings of modern Uzbek historiography are compared with one another, and

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the events are situated within the wider context of Soviet policy in Central Asia rather than treated as isolated local episodes.

The formation of the Soviet political system in Khorezm

After the abolition of the Khanate of Khiva in February 1920, new organs of authority were created in Khorezm. With the establishment of the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic on 30 April 1920 a new form of state administration came into being. Representatives of local political and enlightened circles — among them Polvonniyoz Hoji Yusupov, Bobooxun Salimov and Bekjon Rahmonov — served in the first government [1; 2].

Although the republic was initially constituted as a people's democratic state, the influence of Soviet Russia over its political life grew rapidly. From 1921 onwards the leadership of the republic underwent sharp changes: a portion of the local political figures were removed from office or subjected to political pressure [1]. The turnover of cadres was not merely administrative; it reflected a deliberate substitution of a locally rooted elite by officials whose loyalty was owed to the centre rather than to the region.

In 1923–1924 the political situation in Khorezm deteriorated further. In several districts popular discontent arose in response to the political and economic measures of the Soviet authorities. Following the suppression of these disturbances, the activity of the organs of political surveillance and punishment was intensified [2; 4].

In the course of Sovietization, control over society was established through the apparatus of state administration, the judiciary and the security organs. This process led in subsequent years to the consolidation of precisely those administrative and legal mechanisms that political repression would require [1; 4]. The party organization, the trade unions and the youth leagues were incorporated into the same vertical chain of command, so that by the middle of the decade practically no organized public activity remained outside state supervision.

The national-territorial delimitation of 1924 and its consequences

In 1924 the national-territorial delimitation of Central Asia was carried out. As a result of this process, such political formations as the Turkestan ASSR, the Bukhara People's Soviet Republic and the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic were abolished and new national republics were created [1; 3].

At the end of 1924 the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic ceased to exist. The larger part of the Uzbek-inhabited territories of Khorezm was incorporated into the Uzbek SSR, while other districts were transferred to the Turkmen SSR and to the Karakalpak Autonomous Region [2; 3].

The delimitation of 1924 abolished the previous political and territorial status of Khorezm and converted it into a constituent unit of the new Soviet administrative order. Thereafter Soviet state administration, economic policy and the systems of education and culture were implemented in the region with growing consistency [1]. This process marked a decisive turning point in the political history of Khorezm: local political institutions were liquidated and centralized Soviet governance was strengthened.

Agrarian reform and the restructuring of the economy

During the 1920s a land and water reform, the development of public education, the opening of new schools and the reorganization of state administration were carried out in Khorezm. Historical sources record measures aimed at transforming land and

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water relations, supplying the peasantry with agricultural implements and raising the level of literacy [1; 5].

The agrarian question held particular weight in Khorezm, where the whole structure of cultivation depended on artificial irrigation. Large landholdings and the endowed properties of religious institutions were redistributed, and part of the irrigated land was transferred to peasant households that had previously worked as tenants. For a section of the rural population these measures brought a tangible improvement in their position. At the same time the reform dismantled the traditional mechanisms by which irrigation canals had been maintained. The customary offices responsible for distributing water were replaced by administrative bodies whose officials frequently lacked local experience, and in a number of districts this resulted in the neglect of canal networks and a decline in yields.

Economic policy was subordinated from the outset to the requirements of the centre. The region was assigned a role within an all-Union division of labour in which Central Asia was to supply raw cotton to the textile industry of the metropolitan provinces. The expansion of cotton acreage gradually displaced grain and horticultural cultivation, and the population became increasingly dependent on food imported from outside the region. Towards the end of the decade the transition to collective forms of farming intensified this dependence: households that resisted entering the collectives were subjected to punitive taxation and, in a number of cases, to confiscation and deportation.

Education, language and cultural policy

Cultural policy was one of the principal instruments through which the new order sought to secure its position. A network of Soviet schools was created, courses for the liquidation of illiteracy were opened, and reading rooms and clubs were established in the districts. Literacy among the population rose appreciably, and for the first time a broad stratum of children from poor families obtained access to formal schooling [1; 5].

These achievements, however, were inseparable from a reshaping of the content of education. The traditional maktabs and madrasas, which had constituted the educational foundation of Khorezm for centuries, were gradually closed or converted into secular institutions. Instruction was reorganized around a curriculum defined by the centre, in which the new ideology occupied a central place.

The successive reforms of the alphabet had especially far-reaching consequences. The transition from the Arabic script to the Latin alphabet at the end of the 1920s, and subsequently to the Cyrillic alphabet, severed the direct connection between the younger generation and the manuscript heritage of the region. Chronicles, poetry, legal documents and scholarly works written over centuries became inaccessible to readers educated under the new system, and the interpretation of the past passed into the hands of a small circle of specialists working within prescribed limits.

Religious policy and the transformation of social institutions

Religious institutions occupied a central position in the social organization of Khorezm. Mosques and madrasas were not only places of worship and instruction but also centres of local social life, supported by endowed property and by the authority of learned families. The new administration regarded these institutions as competitors for social influence, and during the 1920s their material foundation was steadily withdrawn: endowed lands were transferred to the state, religious courts lost their

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jurisdiction, and the registration of marriage and inheritance was placed under civil authority. The dissolution of these institutions also removed the customary structures of charity, arbitration and local instruction, while members of the religious estate were among the first social groups to be classified as politically unreliable and excluded from public life.

Women's emancipation and the campaign of the late 1920s

The campaign for the emancipation of women, launched across Central Asia in the second half of the 1920s, was pursued in Khorezm as well. Legislation prohibited child marriage and polygamy, established the right of women to divorce, and opened schools, courses and medical institutions to them. Women entered teaching, medicine and clerical employment, and the first female teachers and medical workers of local origin began their professional careers in these years. The campaign was frequently conducted through administrative pressure, however, and the conflicts it provoked within families and communities illustrate the wider pattern of Sovietization in the region: measures of genuine emancipatory content were implemented by coercive means, and their social cost was correspondingly high.

Political control and the mechanisms of repression

It would be a one-sided approach to evaluate the policy of Sovietization solely in terms of positive change. As the political system became centralized, the scope for independent decision-making by local political forces contracted. Surveillance was intensified over those who did not accept Soviet ideology or who expressed a critical attitude towards the policy of the centre [1; 4]. The position of the national intelligentsia, of local statesmen and of political activists grew especially precarious.

From the second half of the 1920s the strengthening of the mechanisms of political control prepared the ground for the implementation of mass repression in the 1930s [4]. The history of Khorezm includes numerous political and public figures who were persecuted in the 1930s, a proportion of whom had served in state and public organizations during the 1920s. Their fate demonstrates with particular clarity the contradictions inherent in the relationship between the Soviet political system and local cadres [4].

One of the gravest consequences of the policy of Sovietization was the intensification of political control over society. By the 1930s such political accusations as "counter-revolutionary activity", "nationalism" and "enemy of the people" had come into wide use, and as a result many individuals active in various spheres of state and society were persecuted [4].

In Khorezm the political repressions likewise had a destructive effect on the lives of numerous intellectuals, statesmen, military servicemen and public activists. Some of them were arrested and tried, or sentenced to execution [4]. This process may also be observed in the fate of figures such as Qurbon Beregin, who worked in the fields of the press, education and culture in his own time. In the 1930s Qurbon Beregin took an active part in the publishing and literary life of Uzbekistan and directed the journal "Sharq yulduzi"; he subsequently became a victim of political repression in his turn [4; 6].

The accusations advanced in these years followed a recognizable pattern. Participation in the government of the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic, education received in a traditional religious institution, correspondence with relatives abroad, or membership of the pre-revolutionary enlightened circles could each be construed as

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evidence of hostile intent. Since the charge derived from a person's biography rather than from any identifiable act, the accused had virtually no means of refuting it. For this reason the Soviet political administration and the system of surveillance that took shape in Khorezm in the 1920s cannot be studied in isolation from the processes of repression of the 1930s.

The social consequences of Sovietization

Taken as a whole, the transformations of 1920–1930 altered the social structure of Khorezm profoundly. The traditional elite — the landholding families, the religious scholars, the merchants and the artisan masters — lost their economic base and their standing, while a new stratum of administrative and party officials took shape whose position depended entirely on appointment from above. Social mobility became possible, but it was mediated exclusively through loyalty to the state. The generation of enlightened figures who had participated in the government of the republic in the early 1920s was removed from public activity within a single decade, which interrupted the transmission of scholarly and literary tradition and left a gap that later generations of scholars had to reconstruct.

Conclusion

In the years 1920–1930 the policy of Sovietization in Khorezm was implemented in successive stages. Although a system of state administration involving local political forces was initially formed within the framework of the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic, the political influence of Soviet Russia subsequently grew ever stronger [1; 2]. The political confrontations of 1923–1924, the suppression of popular discontent, the strengthening of the organs of surveillance and punishment, and the national-territorial delimitation of 1924 together produced a fundamental turning point in the political life of Khorezm [2; 3].

While certain changes were indeed accomplished in education, culture and the economy in the course of Sovietization, the centralization of the political system restricted the independence of local political forces. By the 1930s the mechanisms of political control and repression had grown still stronger and led to mass persecution [4].

The evidence examined here suggests that the repressions of 1937–1938 should be understood not as a sudden rupture but as the culmination of an administrative and ideological order assembled over the preceding fifteen years. Studying the history of Khorezm in 1920–1930 is therefore essential to a historical understanding of the political repressions of the late 1930s. To investigate the lives and activity of the victims of repression on a scholarly basis, to restore their names and to preserve historical memory remains one of the important tasks of contemporary historiography.

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