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When Sheybani Khan had made his political aims clear, his Sufi mentor Sheykh Mansur ordered his disciples to bring a table cloth and said to him: “In the same way as a table cloth is picked up from the corner, you should start to build a state from the corner”. Thereafter Sheybani Khan left Bokhara for the Dasht-e Qipchaq and started his military conquests. The story, also quoted by Semenov, may be apocryphal, but at the beginning of the 16th century a significant political transformation took place in Central Asia. Mohammad Sheybani, the founder and the great khan of the Mavarannahr Uzbek state, took control of the towns along the Syr-Darya region, conquered Samarqand from Babur (Ẓahir al-Din Bâbor) in 907/1501, and Balkh and Herat from the sons of Hoseyn Bayqara (in 911/1505 and 913/1507 respectively), thus putting an end to the rule of the Timurids and taking possession of the regions of Mavarannahr and Khorasan.

Sheybani Khan was a genuine Chingizid, a direct descendant of Chingiz Khan. His grandfather, Abu’l-Khayr Khan (d. 1468), the founder of the Uzbek confederation in the Qipchaq steppe, was a descendant of Chingiz Khan’s son Jochi, through the latter’s son Sheyban. Sheybani Khan moreover joined the two Chingizid lines of Jochi and Chaghatay through marriage alliances of himself, as well as those of members of his close family, with the family of Yunus Khan, a direct descendant of Chingiz Khan’s son, Chaghatay.

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Up till now it has been generally accepted that the establishment of the Mavarannahr Uzbek state did not bring much change in the political and cultural situation of southern Central Asia and the contributions of Sheybani Khan and his successors remain overshadowed by the Timurid legacy. However, it cannot be denied that the move by Sheybani Khan and his Uzbek tribesmen into these regions may have exerted a notable impact. It is noteworthy that the Mavarannahr Uzbek state founded by Sheybani Khan lasted until the mid-18th century by which time the Uzbek tribes were politically and economically asserting themselves. Moreover, it is also noteworthy that the neo-Chingizid claims were readily accepted by the political system of southern Central Asia. The Uzbek state, based on the appanage system laid the foundation for the region’s political development over the next centuries and affected the political ideas, manners and expectations of successive generations of statesmen. The Uzbek state system which favored power sharing and the limitation of authority evolved during the confrontation with sedentary regions throughout the centuries. Thus I believe that the 16th century witnessed the emergence of new political formations and a change and metamorphosis in political culture in particular.

The aim of this paper is to underline some interesting features of the process which lead to the rise of Sheybani Khan and his establishment of the Uzbek state, and to understand some aspects of the political culture both in the steppe and sedentary regions. Indeed, it is possible to gain much information about the political culture during this period of transformation by analysing this process, by looking at the ideas, values and vision he projected, and by examining the rhetoric he used and the policies he devised in connection with the customs, perceptions and expectations of the people of different backgrounds – tribes, sedentary people and Sufi orders – which shape the political life of the society.

A joint Chingizid-Muslim legitimacy

Sheybani Khan founded a durable state, although not a stable one, one that compared well politically and culturally with its immediate predecessors in Mavarannahr. He rose to power in a period when both the sedentary regions and the steppe were experiencing the complexities of a changing world. He himself perceived these complexi-
ties in his own life. He became fully aware of them when he witnessed the failure of his grandfather Abu’l-Khayr Khan in the Qipchaq steppe and his Timurid rivals in sedentary regions, namely Bokhara and Samarqand during his kazaklik (“wandering”) period. His ways, manners and values were probably shaped during this period and made him familiar with the process of the formation of states, and sensitive to the perceptions and expectations of the people.

He knew well that being a descendant of Chingiz Khan was not enough to secure the loyalties either of the Uzbek tribes or of sedentary people, and he already defined himself by another identity, that is the Muslim one. “By personal attainment I am the servant of God. By birth I am from the house of Chingiz”, says he in his Divân. He also defines his understanding of authority by this identity when he says : “God is the king of all kings. He who serves God becomes a sultan”. This means that he is also obeying a higher authority. He therefore manages to integrate both the tribal and the sedentary ideals into his understanding of the limits of power. Moreover, Sheybani Khan’s biographer, Mohammad Saleh, made this explicit in his Sheybâni-nâma, when he explained why he had joined Sheybani Khan. He tells us that he consulted intellectuals and they said to him:

\begin{verbatim}
Yuci Khan oglı Jingiz toruni
Barche khanlardin a’li oruni
Bardur aning ishi Quran birle
Olturubdur nije sultan birle

“He is the descendant of Jochi and the grandson of Chingiz / His place is above all khans / He follows the Koran / He consults sultans”
\end{verbatim}

These words underline some important aspects of the political understanding of this period. They also indicate how the literary circle rationalised their joining Sheybani Khan by first stressing Sheybani Khan’s genealogy and, more importantly, by showing that he was acting according to the Koran, that is also according to the shari’a. Being a Chingizid and acting according to the Koran put him above all khans. But what is most important is that unlike the Timurids who were unable to stick together as a family, Sheybani Khan is supposed to have understood the principles of good government, i.e. power sharing.
Sheybanî Khan’s relations with the tribal people

The rise of Sheybanî Khan was not defined by hereditary, that is, by dynastic connections. Indeed there is no concrete reference in the sources to an official enthronement of Sheybanî Khan by his dynastic family as a khan, but the tradition of succession by seniority was followed by his immediate successors. Sources give the impression that Sheybanî Khan managed progressively to surround himself with many people. When he started his kazaklik there were only 40 people around him. Then they became 100, then 600, and more and more, following the pattern of the rise of leaders in Central Asia, like Chingiz or Timur. But the state which Sheybanî Khan founded is somewhat different from that of Chingiz and Timur. Moreover, in contemporary sources there is no explanation of why Sheybanî Khan and his younger brother, Mahmud-Soltan Bahador, were especially protected by Abu’l-Khayr Khan’s close amirs, nor of why the Abu’l-Khayrid amirs removed Sheybanî and his brother from the care of Sheykh Beg Uighur and entrusted the princes to Qarachin Bahador, after the death of Abu’l-Khayr in 1468. The Tavârikh-e gozida-ye Noşrât-nâma explains that the amirs of Abu’l-Khayr thought that his grandsons were his favourites and therefore they should be taken care of.

It is also interesting to note that Sheybanî Khan was supposed to have been elected as a khan by the Mangit tribes before his conquests of Mavarannahr. Banna’i says that when Sheybanî Khan took control of Signak he was invited by Musa Mirza; then he went to the Dashte Qipchaq and sat on the throne of the khanate. Later on when Sheybanî Khan and his brother were successful against Burunduk Khan, Musa Mirza gave his daughter in marriage to Soyunj (Sevinj) Khwaja Khan. They went to Signak together and once there, Musa Mirza informed Sheybanî Khan that the Mangit amirs wanted to make him khan on the condition that he obeyed the ancient principle of power sharing with the amirs. Banna’i continues saying that Musa Mirza changed his mind, and Sheybanî Khan lost his hope of being elected as a khan by the Mangit amirs. It is well known that the key support for the consolidation of Abu’l-Khayr’s rule seems to have come from within the Mangit confederation, namely from one of the grandsons of Edigu, Vaqqas Bey, who was supported by many tribes. However, Abu’l-Khayr also experienced the individualism of the Uzbek tribes which contributed to the dissolution of the Uzbek
confederation. Sheybani Khan witnessed the desintegration of the tribal confederation built up by Abu'l-Khayr and his failure to bring his people closer to settled communities in Mavarannahr and along the eastern bank of the Syr-Darya river.\(^{16}\)

From the beginning of his career Sheybani Khan does not seem to have been as strongly supported by dominant tribal groups. According to the *Tavârikh-e gozida*, Sheybani Khan had few people with him, and half of these came from the Qushchi tribe.\(^{17}\) He found support among different tribal groups during his career. He was well aware that it was impossible to obtain unconditional loyalty at that time. Though Mangit support prepared the way for the conquest of Mavarannahr, he had to content himself with the shifting loyalties of Vaqqas Bey’s son, Musa Mirza, who gave support to him at different times. Moreover, the support of Musa Mirza did not mean the support of all the Mangit tribes and it is clear that within large tribal groupings like the Mangit, Nayman, Durman or Qushchi there was little solidarity.\(^{18}\) Throughout his career, Sheybani Khan was many times abandoned by the Uzbek tribes at more or less critical moments. Some of the sources reflect the weakness of his command over them. Indeed, in many cases he tried not to force but to persuade tribes and tribal leaders to follow him.

Tribes generally acted independently from Sheybani Khan even after his political successes and his rise to power. Many vivid scenes can be found in Mohammad Saleh’s *Sheybâni-nâma* depicting the independent actions of Uzbek tribes. Here is what he wrote during the long siege of Samarqand:

*Qalmadi khan chirikiga Uzbek*  
*Bardi bisyar il andak-andak*  
*Qaysi Kufin u Ferähin kitti*  
*Qaysi Khârkân u Hezârä yetti*  
*Qaysi Kerminaga tuzdi aheng*  
*Qildi shahâna besât u evrenk*

“No Uzbek remained in Khan’s army / They left one by one / Some went to Kuffin and some went to Ferahin / Some reached Kharkan and some reached Hezara / Some of them settled in Karmina / They went to those places to settle in and to have a good life.”\(^{19}\)
We can understand these lines in terms of the individualism of Uzbek tribes. Moreover, they make it possible to imagine the process of the sedentarisation of nomadic Uzbek tribes, which was being accomplished voluntarily and individually, and not on the command of a leader. When Khwaja Yahya, a descendant of Khwaja Ahrar, was killed, Sheybani Khan was accused of having had him killed. When Sheybani Khan claimed that the affair of Khwaja Yahya was not his doing and that it had been done by Bey Qanbar and Kopek Bey, Babur noted that “if begs have free rein to engage in such acts without the knowledge of their khan or padshah, what is the use of khanate or kingship?” Whatever the truth, this visibly reflects the difference between Babur’s and Sheybani Khan’s understanding of kingship.

It seems that in this period the actions of individuals rather than those of groups shaped the political life of the society. Individuals were more independently minded than before. But the ways in which individuals formed relations with each other represents an aspect of political culture that evolved throughout the centuries and especially with the spread of the Sufi form of Islam.

It can be argued that there was no cohesive force to keep not only tribes or other groups, but also the Abu’l-Khayrid sultans in a solid community. Dynastic kinship was not enough to keep them together, to lead them to act together and to form a common front. The establishment of an appanage system and the development of an independent appanage policy also represents this individuality in a political realm. Mohammad Sheybani Khan initiated the conquests and then invited the participation of other clans in further conquests and in the organisation of the new states. They participated alongside him if they wished to. Banna’i says that Sheybani Khan asked his uncles Kuchkunji Khan and Soyunj Khwaja Khan through his amir ‘Abbas Hitami to join him, as well as he also invited Hamza Soltan and Mahdi Soltan. The Bakhtiyarid sultans Mahdi and Hamza had been in Mavarannahr before Sheybani Khan arrived, and they served the Timurids, especially Babur, for a certain time. Both are mentioned many times on the pages of Babur’s memoirs. Later, they joined Sheybani Khan. Although they were Bakhtiyarids and not Abu’l-Khayrids, they became appanage holders. In the appanage system, it was the kinship with the newly established neo-eponymous dynastic clan and also the actual participation in the conquest that secured
specific rights and loyalties that could be called upon in specific parts of the newly conquered territories.

Although the basic distribution of the appanages was made in 1511, after the death of Sheybani Khan, Banna’i talks about such a distribution performed by Sheybani Khan himself, which included the Abu’l-Khayrid and the Bakhtiyarid sultans, as well as notable amirs. According to Banna’i, Sheybani Khan gave Turkestan to Kuchkunji Khan, Tashkent to Soyunj Khan, Andijan to Jani Beg Soltan, Shahrokhiya to Amir Ya’qub and Hesar to the Bakhtyarid sultans, Mahmud and Hamza. In the first half of the 16th century Hesar-e Shadman was the appanage of the sons of Bakhtiyar. The violation of the distribution of appanages caused unrest among appanage holders even during the lifetime of Sheybani Khan who was supposed to have had a much more centralised authority as a khan than his successors. The author of the Zobdâtkal’asârk notes that:

“Sheybâni Khân did something unpleasant. He took Torkestân from the hands of Kuchkunji Khân and gave it to Seyyed ‘Asheq, and he took Bokhara from ‘Obeydallâh and he gave it to Seyyed ‘Âsheq, and he took Hesâr-e Shâdmân from Mahmud Solţân and gave it to ‘Obeydallâh Khân”.

Sheybani Khan’s relations with the Sufi orders

Some aspects of Sheybani Khan’s relations with the spiritual leaders and with the Sufi orders in general must be stressed in order to understand the process leading to the rise of Sheybani Khan. It is well known that, even during his kazaklik period, Sheybani Khan found support among spiritual leaders. It has also been assumed that this support enabled him to conquer Mavarannahr. However, much study remains to be done to understand the relations between Sufi orders and khans during the 16th and the later centuries. Sheybani Khan became well aware of the fact that popular sheykhos who led Sufi orders played important economic, cultural, political and social roles. He also knew that they could give a useful support as far as the balance of forces between khan/sultan/amir was concerned. Moreover, the increasing dominance of the Sufi orders through their economic and political power and through their intellectual and spiritual reputation seems to be connected with a change in political culture. Sheybani
Khan’s ties with the Sufi orders should also be understood in terms of a metamorphosis in political culture, and not only in terms of his political goals.

Throughout his early life Sheybani Khan was guided by religious tutors and counsellors. While living in Bokhara under Timurid protection, he studied under the tutelage of a famous Koran reciter, Mowlana Khitayi. The support that Sheybani Khan gained from the leaders of the Sufi orders such as the Naqshbandiyya, Kibraviyya, Yasaviyya is a well known fact. From the scattered records in historic chronicles and hagiographic sources, it is possible to conclude that Sheybani Khan’s connections with spiritual leaders contributed to his success, since they helped him to obtain the support of the sedentary people and thus to gain control of the cities.

Sheybani Khan seems to us almost certainly to have achieved a balance among different Sufi orders and to have controlled their influence over politics. However, this balance was shortlived. Towards the end of the 16th century, the Naqshbandi order progressively became dominant. When we look at Sheybani Khan’s relations with the spiritual leaders, we can find scattered information both in contemporary narrative histories and in hagiographic sources. Banna’i tells us that it was the prayer of Khwaja Mohammad Parsa which made Sheybani Khan’s conquest of Mavarannahr possible. Sources lack concrete evidence of the relations between Sheybani Khan and the descendants of Khwaja Mohammad Parsa. However, during the first conquest of Bokhara, some of them were among the people who met Sheybani Khan.

According to the Lamahat, a Bokharan sheykh, Jamal al-Din ‘Azizan, became his Sufi guide. The same source asserts that when Sheykh Jamal al-Din ‘Azizan did not approve of his political aims, Sheybani Khan changed his spiritual guide and turned to Sheykh Mansur who was a naqshbandi. This source further adds that when Sheybani Khan conquered Bokhara he forced Sheykh ‘Azizan to leave the city for Herat, where he became famous. The Lamahat tells the story of the relations between Sheybani Khan and Sheykh Mansur which has been quoted at the beginning of this paper. This story implies that Sheybani Khan got the permission from his spiritual leader to start his conquests and the promise to help him in this entreprise.
Sheybani Khan’s rhetoric

It seems that Sheybani Khan’s rhetoric found much audience and helped him to be accepted by sedentary people. His rhetoric is clearly shown in the following lines quoted by Mohammad Saleh, who supposedly records words of Sheybani Khan spoken during the siege of Bokhara:

*Shehr ahligha yibardi peygham*
*Kim irur khâş menga khâş ile ‘am*

“He sent an envoy to the people of the city and said: / Elite or common people, you are all elite for me.”

He projects himself as a sovereign who rules with piety, equity and generosity saying “you are not alien to me or not different from me”. Sheybani Khan states it explicitly when he says, during the siege of Samarqand:

*Her niche il tilamas min tilaram*
*Il mini silamas min silaram*
*Min tilab tingri biribtur ey sheykh*
*Tingri sozi minga kiriibtur ey sheykh*

“Even if people do not want me, I want them / If people do not like me, I like them / What I want is God’s will, / What I say is God’s word.”

Here he clearly explains and legitimises his actions and claims. He also adds:

*Chaghatây il mini Uzbek dimasun*
*Beyhuda fikr qîlib gham yimasun*
*Ger min Uzbek ilidin dur min*
*Lik tingriga irur bu revshan*
*Kim tilar min bari il âşnañin*
*Bîlmasam jam ara durd u şafin*

“Chaghatay people do not call me Uzbek / do not be worried about that I am an Uzbek / I am from the Uzbek ulus / but my light comes from God / I see no difference among all people who want me.”

These lines reflect the rhetoric of Sheybani Khan and imply the expectations of the people to some extent. The differences between
the rhetoric of Sheybanî Khan and that of Babur can be observed when they tried to be accepted by the people. In Mohammad Saleh’s Sheybânî-nâma there are very vivid and remarkable passages on the famous struggle between Sheybanî Khan and Babur for Samarqand. After the defeat at Saripul, Babur found refuge in Samarqand and he begged help from the people, saying:

“My ancestor Timur was the king of the World of justice. Ages have passed since he died and now all people forget him. Please, remember him and see him close even if he is far away, and please give me help for the sake of my forefathers”\(^3\).

Babur enumerates in his Bâbûr-nâma the long list of the Timurid rulers to support his claim to Samarqand. He states that Samarqand is his legitimate throne, because it used to be the throne of his forefathers. But Sheybânî Khan says:

“Samarqand is my throne by the grace of God”\(^3\).

At the end of the struggle between Sheybanî Khan and Babur, the former was successful. His military qualities contributed to his victory. But other important things may also have contributed to his rise and the establishment of the Uzbek state. He symbolised a change in the political culture and his actions affected the shape of southern Central Asia. Indeed, the ways in which he was building his state were widely accepted within a society which was also experiencing a cultural change.

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NOTES
1. Sheyk ʿÂlem ʿAzîzân, Lamahât min nafaqât al-ons, ms IO Tashkent, No. 495, fol. 80b [hereafter: Lamahât].


7. For the term “Kazaklik”, see Isenbike Togan, “Political, Cultural and Economic relation between Central Asia and Turkey in the Period of Temur”, a paper presented at the Conference Amir Timur and His role in History, Tashkent, 24 October 1996, p. 5.

8. Sheybâni Khan, Divân, Ms Istanbul Topkapi, Ahmed III Library, No. 2436, fol. 11 [hereafter : Divân].

9. Divân, fol. 36.


11. It is important to note that especially in Mohammad Saleh’s Sheybâni-nâma, the author praises achievements not only of Sheybani Khan, but also these of other sultans, particularly his brother Mahmud-Soltan Bahador. Though the book is devoted to Sheybani Khan and was written during his lifetime, there are lines where it is sometimes difficult to discern whom the author sided with and what was his standpoint.

12. Bannâ’i, Sheybâni-nâma, Ms IO Tashkent, No. 3422, fol. 7a.

13. Ibid., fol. 5b.


15. Bannâ’i, Sheybâni-nâma, fol. 11a-b.


17. Tavârikh-i guzîda-Nasrat-nâma, fol. 96a.

18. This situation can be traced in the appanage politics.


22. The term was first used by Dickson, Šâh Tahmâsb and the Uzbeks, p. 20-37.


25. Bannâ’i, Sheybâni-nâma, fol. 9b.

27. Bannâ‘i, Sheybâni-nâma, fol. 10a.
29. Lamahîr, fol. 80b.
30. Lamahîr, fol. 81a.
32. Ibid., p. 148.
33. Ibid., p. 148.
34. Ibid., p. 104.
35. Ibid., p. 148.