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## KAZAKH–OIRAT RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF REGIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA (15TH – EARLY 17TH CENTURIES)

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**Abstract:** *Introduction.* The research focuses on military confrontations, diplomatic practices, and territorial and resource-based conflicts that shaped the nature of relations between Kazakh and Oirat political actors during the period under consideration. *Objectives.* The aim of the study is to identify the principal forms of interaction between the Kazakh Khanate and the Oirat tribal associations in the 15th–early 17th centuries and to trace the transformation of regional connections in Central Asia under the influence of these contacts. The objectives included the analysis of the military, diplomatic, and territorial-resource aspects of Kazakh–Oirat relations, as well as an assessment of their significance for changes in the political situation in the region. *Materials and Methods.* The methodological framework of the study is based on comparative-historical and source-critical analysis applied to a heterogeneous corpus of written sources, including Persian–Turkic chronicles, Chinese dynastic annals, and Russian written materials of the 16th–17th centuries. The use of a problem-chronological approach makes it possible to reconstruct the dynamics of Kazakh–Oirat contacts and to compare data from different traditions of written documentation. *Results.* The results of the study demonstrate that relations between the Kazakhs and the Oirats were complex and multi-layered in character. Alongside military conflicts, diplomatic mechanisms and negotiation practices played a significant role, while territorial disputes were driven by competition for pasturelands and population. These processes exerted a noticeable influence on changes in the political situation of the steppe space and contributed to the formation of new models of inter-polity interaction in Central Asia. *Conclusion.* The scholarly novelty of the article lies in its comprehensive analysis of the early stage of Kazakh–Oirat relations as a significant factor in

the transformation of regional connections in Central Asia during the late medieval period preceding the formation of the Dzungar Khanate.

**Keywords:** Kazakh Khanate, Oirats, Kalmyks, Moghulistan, Dzungaria, military conflicts, diplomacy, international relations.

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**Андратпа.** *Kiриспе.* Зерттеуде әскери қақтығыстар, дипломатиялық тәжірибелер мен аумақтық-ресурстық жаңжалдар басты назарда болады, ойткені олар қарастырылып отырған кезенде қазақ және ойрат саяси күштері арасындағы қатынастардың сипатын айқындағы. *Мақсаты мен міндеттері.* Зерттеудің мақсаты – XV – XVII ғасырдың басында Қазақ хандығы мен ойрат тайпалық бірлестіктері арасындағы өзара әрекеттестіктің негізгі формаларын айқындау және осы байланыстардың Орталық Азиядағы аймақтық қатынастардың трансформациясына ықпалын зерделеу. Зерттеу міндеттері қазақ–ойрат қатынастарының әскери, дипломатиялық және аумақтық-ресурстық аспекттілерін талдауды, сондай-ақ олардың өнірдегі саяси жағдайының өзгеруіне ықпалын анықтауды қамтыды. *Материалдар мен әдістер.* Зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізін салыстырмалы-тариҳи және деректанулық талдау құрайды. Бұл әдістер парсы-түркі шежірелері, Қытайдың династиялық жылнамалары, сондай-ақ XVI–XVII ғасырлардағы орыс жазба деректерін қамтитын әртекті жазба деректер корпусына қолданылды. Проблемалық-хронологиялық тәсілді пайдалану қазақ–ойрат байланыстарының динамикасын қайта қалпына келтіруге және жазба дәстүрлердің әртүрлі деректерін салыстыра талдауға мүмкіндік береді. *Нәтижелер.* Зерттеу нәтижесінде қазақтар мен ойраттар арасындағы қарым-қатынастардың кешенді әрі қөпдеңгейлі сипатта болғаны анықталды. Әскери қақтығыстармен қатар дипломатиялық тетіктер мен келіссөз жүргізу тәжірибелері маңызды рөл атқарды, ал аумақтық даулар негізінен жайылымдық жерлер мен халық үшін бәсекелестікпен байланысты болды. Аталған үдерістер Орталық Азиядағы дала кеңістігінің саяси конфигурациясының өзгеруіне елеулі ықпал етіп, өнірде мемлекетаралық өзара іс-қимылдың жаңа үлгілерінің қалыптасуына жағдай жасады. *Қорытынды.* Мақаланың ғылыми жаңалығы Қазақ хандығы мен ойраттар арасындағы қатынастардың ерте кезеңін Орталық Азиядағы аймақтық байланыстардың трансформациясына ықпал еткен маңызды фактор ретінде кешенді түрде талдауда көрініс табады. Бұл кезең Джунгар хандығының қалыптасуынан бұрынғы тарихи үдерістерді қамтиды.

**Кілт сөздер:** Қазақ хандығы, ойраттар, қалмақтар, Моголстан, Жонғария, әскери қақтығыстар, дипломатия, халықаралық қатынастар.

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## КАЗАХСКО-ОЙРАТСКИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ В КОНТЕКСТЕ РЕГИОНАЛЬНЫХ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЙ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ (XV – НАЧАЛО XVII ВВ.)

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**Аннотация.** *Введение.* В центре внимания находятся военные столкновения, дипломатические практики и территориально-ресурсные конфликты, которые определяли характер отношений между казахскими и ойратскими политическими силами в рассматриваемый период. *Цель и задачи.* Цель исследования – выявить основные формы взаимодействия Казахского ханства с ойратскими племенными объединениями в XV – начале XVII вв. и проследить трансформацию региональных связей Центральной Азии под влиянием этих контактов. Задачи включали анализ военных, дипломатических и территориально-ресурсных аспектов казахско-ойратских отношений, а также их значения для изменения политической ситуации в регионе. *Материалы и методы.* Методологическую основу исследования составляют сравнительно-исторический и источниковедческий анализ, применяемые к разнородному корпусу письменных источников, включающему персидско-тюркские хроники, китайские династийные анналы, а также русские письменные источники XVI–XVII вв. Использование проблемно-хронологического подхода позволяет реконструировать динамику казахско-ойратских контактов и сопоставить данные различных традиций письменной фиксации. *Результаты.* В результате исследования установлено, что взаимоотношения казахов и ойратов носили комплексный и многоуровневый характер. Наряду с военными конфликтами важную роль играли дипломатические механизмы и переговорные практики, а территориальные споры были обусловлены конкуренцией за пастбищные угодья и население. Эти процессы оказали заметное влияние на изменение политической конфигурации степного пространства и способствовали формированию новых моделей межполитического взаимодействия в Центральной Азии. *Заключение.* Научная новизна статьи заключается в комплексном анализе раннего этапа казахско-ойратских отношений как значимого фактора трансформации региональных связей Центральной Азии в позднесредневековый период, предшествовавший формированию Джунгарского ханства.

**Ключевые слова:** Казахское ханство, ойраты, калмыки, Могулистан, Джунгария, военные конфликты, дипломатия, международные отношения.

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**Introduction.** Relations between the Kazakh Khanate and the western Mongols (Oirats) in the 15th to the early 17th century constitute an important yet insufficiently explored page in the history of Central Asia. This period spans from the formation of the Kazakh Khanate in the second half of the 15th century to the early decades of the 17th century, which preceded the emergence of the Dzungar Khanate.

Although the Kazakh–Dzungar wars of the 17th – 18th centuries have been extensively studied [Moiseev 2000], the earlier contacts between the Kazakhs and the Oirats remain covered only fragmentarily. In pre-revolutionary and Soviet historiography [Bichurin, 1991; Zlatkin, 1983], the events of this period were mentioned primarily within general surveys of Oirat history, whereas Kazakhstani researchers [Sultanov, 1982; Abuseitova, 1985] focused mainly on particular aspects of the foreign policy of the Kazakh Khanate in the 16th century.

At the same time, interaction between the Kazakh Khanate and the Oirat tribes during the 15th to early 17th centuries was not limited to isolated military encounters. It evolved through a combination of armed confrontation, diplomatic contacts, and competition for key economic resources, including pasturelands and control over migration routes. These forms of interaction were embedded in broader regional processes and directly affected the configuration of political ties in Central Asia.

However, a comprehensive analysis of the forms of interaction between the Kazakhs and the Oirats during this era – and of their impact on the transformation of regional connections – remains lacking.

The purpose of this article is to identify the principal forms of interaction between the Kazakh Khanate and the Oirat tribes in the 15th – early 17th centuries and to determine how these contacts influenced the evolution of political relations in the region.

The issues related to early Kazakh–Oirat relations have thus far been addressed only fragmentarily within general works on the history of nomadic societies of Eurasia. A classical contribution is the study by N. Y. Bichurin, who proposed the first systematic account of Oirat (Kalmyk) history from the 15th century onward. A significant contribution was also made by I. Y. Zlatkin, who examined the genesis and foreign policy of the Dzungar Khanate, primarily focusing on the later stages of Oirat state formation.

In Kazakhstani historiography, certain aspects of the external relations of the Kazakh Khanate were explored by T. I. Sultanov, who studied nomadic tribes of the Aral region in the 15th–17th centuries, and by M. Kh. Abuseitova, whose works address the foreign policy of the Kazakh Khanate in the second half of the 16th century, among others. However, these studies concentrate on specific regions, political episodes, or chronological segments and do not provide a focused analysis of direct Kazakh–Oirat interaction. As a result, the forms of contact between the Kazakhs and the Oirats – military, diplomatic, and socio-political – have not yet been examined as an integrated phenomenon in the context of the 15th–16th centuries.

The source base of the present research encompasses a wide range of materials in several languages. Information on the events of the period under examination is contained in medieval Persian and Turkic chronicles, including *Tarikh-i Rashidi* by Muhammad Haydar Dulati [Dulati, 1999; 2016], in the Chinese dynastic annals of the Ming dynasty [Pokotilov, 1893], as well as in Russian sources of the 16th–17th centuries (chronicles, diplomatic reports, and administrative documentation). Additional data are derived from the Kalmyk historical tradition and from materials introduced into scholarly circulation by Soviet researchers, including collections of Persian and Ottoman accounts concerning the Kalmyks and the Kazakhs.

The use of heterogeneous sources makes it possible to reconstruct the dynamics of political interaction between the Kazakh Khanate and the Oirat tribes and to compare the perspectives of different written traditions, thereby allowing for a more balanced interpretation of regional processes.

**Methods and Methodology.** The methodological framework of the study is based on the principles of historicism and a systemic approach, which make it possible to examine Kazakh–Oirat relations as a dynamic process shaped by changing political and regional contexts. The research employs comparative-historical methods and source-critical analysis to correlate data from Persian, Chinese, and Russian written sources and to identify both convergences and discrepancies in their accounts.

A problem-chronological approach is used to trace the evolution of military, diplomatic, and political forms of interaction between the Kazakh Khanate and the Oirat tribes in the 15th–early 17th centuries. This combination of methods allows for the reconstruction of specific mechanisms of inter-polity contact and for their interpretation within the broader framework of transformations in regional and international relations in medieval Central Asia.

**Findings.** The medieval history of the Mongols – including the Oirat tribes – is often approached through a distinction between the period preceding the rise of the Chingisid imperial system and the era of imperial unification. Prior to the early 13th century, the Oirats represented a constellation of forest-steppe communities inhabiting the mountainous regions of present-day western Mongolia and southern Siberia. In 1204, as Temujin consolidated his power across Inner Asia, these tribes acknowledged his authority and were incorporated into the emerging Mongol polity.

With this political integration, the traditional designation «Dorben-Oirat» («Four Oirats») acquired a new imperial connotation. Within the military-administrative vocabulary of the Mongol Empire, the Oirats were classified as «dorben tumen Oirat», being obliged to contribute four *tümen* – a nominal military-administrative unit conventionally equated with approximately forty thousand troops – to the Chingisid military structure [Grousset, 1970: 193].

Within the imperial hierarchy established by Chingis Khan, the Oirat aristocracy occupied a comparatively privileged position. Oirat nobles and their dependents were incorporated into the elite guard of the Great Khan, a status reinforced through dynastic marriage alliances with the Chingisid house. This integration into the core of the imperial military-political system provided Oirat leaders with both prestige and direct access to imperial mechanisms of power [The Cambridge History of Inner Asia, 2015: 113–114].

Following the defeat and westward flight of the Naiman rulers in 1204–1205 – who were driven into the vast steppes of the Dasht-i Qipchaq – the Oirats gradually advanced westward as well, extending their sphere of influence into former Naiman pasturelands across the Altai region. This territorial expansion, carried out under the conditions of imperial unification, marked the first significant repositioning of Oirat groups within the geopolitical landscape of Inner Asia [Grousset, 1970: 214].

The far-reaching reforms implemented by Chingis Khan – most notably the introduction of the decimal military-administrative organization and the large-scale campaigns conducted against neighboring polities – profoundly transformed the internal structure of Mongol society. These institutional innovations diminished the traditional foundations of clan-based authority and significantly accelerated processes of social stratification and the consolidation of hierarchical relations within the Mongol realm. The Oirats, as an integral component of the Chingisid imperial system, were likewise subjected to this socio-political restructuring, which reshaped patterns of power, landholding, and military obligations across Inner Asia [The Cambridge History of Inner Asia, 2015: 161].

The military and administrative integration of the Oirats into the Chingisid system created important geopolitical preconditions for their gradual westward movement toward the steppe territories of present-day Kazakhstan. Consequently, beginning no later than the late 14th century, Oirat groups increasingly entered zones inhabited by Turkic-speaking tribes who later formed the core of the Kazakh polity. This growing proximity laid the foundations for subsequent interaction – both cooperative and confrontational – between the Kazakhs and the Oirats.

As B. Vladimirtsov observed in his seminal study of Mongol social organization, the deliberate intermixing of tribes and lineages within the newly established units of the decimal military-administrative system fundamentally disrupted the traditional kinship order. By dissolving former genealogical and tribal boundaries and reorganizing diverse populations into thousands (*mingyan*) – the core structural elements of the Chingisid polity – the imperial administration effectively undermined the foundations of the old clan-based hierarchy [Venegoni, 2025: 326]. According to Vladimirtsov, this transformation rendered customary clan structures «inevitably destined to decline and lose their former significance» [Vladimirtsov, 1934: 109].

The fragmentation of the Mongol Empire in the 15th century generated new ethno-political structures across Inner Asia. These formations no longer functioned as traditional clan-tribal confederations but evolved into hereditary aristocratic polities governed by ruling lineages. In the Mongolian regions, several influential groups emerged as key political actors, including the Torghuts, Khoshuuts, Derbets, Choros, Khoits, and others.

By the 16th–17th centuries, these lineages had consolidated into a distinct Oirat socio-ethnic community capable of pursuing an independent political agenda and competing for influence within the wider steppe world. Their growing political cohesion became an important factor in the reconfiguration of

regional connections, including their complex and often conflict-driven relations with the Kazakh Khanate [Sanchirov, 1990: 14].

The Oirat groups were known to their neighbors under different ethnonyms, reflecting linguistic traditions and historiographical conventions. In Chinese historical sources, they are consistently recorded under the designations Elut (Eleuth, Olot) and Walate (Weilate), which represent Chinese transcriptions of the Oirat ethnonym [Hummel, 1943–1944: 223].

In European and Russian historiography of the nineteenth century, the designation Kalmyk became firmly established as an external name for the Oirats. Classical works emphasize the coexistence of three principal nomenclatures in historical literature: Oirat as a self-designation preserved in Mongolian tradition; Kalmyk as an exonym consolidated in European and Russian scholarship; and Elut / Eleuth deriving from Chinese historiographical practice [Howorth, 1872; Bichurin, 1991].

The Russian sinologist V. Uspenskii once argued that the term Elut represents a phonetic distortion of the name Oirat. Yet, the broader debate over the etymology and semantic evolution of these ethnonyms – Oirat, Kalmyk, Elut – remains open, continuing to stimulate scholarly discussion within modern historiography [Uspenskiy, 1880: 78].

The ethnonym Dzungar (also rendered as Zhungar or Jungar) derives from the military organization of the Chingisid era. During imperial campaigns, the Oirats traditionally occupied the left wing of the Mongol army – designated in Mongolian as zunghar («left-hand»). This military placement subsequently gave its name to the territories under their control, later known as Dzungaria.

In 18th-century Russian documentation, this region and its inhabitants were referred to as Zengoria or the Zengor (Zungor) land. Over time, the term Dzungar evolved from a functional military designation into a stable ethnonym, widely used in both historical and modern scholarship. Therefore, in the present study, Dzungars is employed interchangeably with Oirats, reflecting both the political and regional identity of the western Mongols [Zlatkin, 1984: 27].

The rule of Toghon (1434–1438) and subsequently of his son Esen Taishi (1439–1455) marked a period of pronounced Oirat geopolitical activism. Their foreign policy manifested itself in sustained military confrontation with the Eastern Mongol princes, in campaigns against Ming China and Moghulistan, and in an ambitious effort to re-establish a unified Mongol state under a centralized authority.

N. Y. Bichurin famously characterized the demise of Esen as the conclusion of «the first, albeit brief yet most illustrious period of Dzungar-Oirat history,» asserting that after his fall, the Oirats were compelled to relinquish influence over pan-Mongolian affairs and withdraw within the boundaries of their own domains [Bichurin, 1991: 22].

However, this interpretation has been critically revised by later scholarship. I. Y. Zlatkin convincingly argued that the change following Esen's death was not a collapse of Oirat power, but rather a strategic reorientation of their foreign policy priorities [Zlatkin, 1983: 41]. Severed from direct access to China and having failed to secure dominance in the east, the Oirat leadership redirected their political and military efforts westward and northward – toward Eastern Turkestan, the steppes of the Dasht-i Qipchaq, and Central Asia – where they emerged as one of the most influential forces shaping the complex regional dynamics of the 15th century.

As the Oirats progressively advanced southwestward during the first half of the 15th century, they entered into direct confrontation with the rulers of Moghulistan – a polity formed in the eastern portion of the former Chaghatai ulus, which had effectively disintegrated by the mid-14th century. Its founder, Tughlugh-Temur Khan (1348–1363), came from a prominent Mongol aristocratic lineage, yet over time Moghulistan developed into a distinct regional power.

During the 14th–15th centuries, the territorial extent of Moghulistan stretched from Turkestan and Tashkent in the west to Turfan and Hami (Qomul) in the east. Its authority reached the Ferghana valley in the south, while the northern frontier extended into the upper Irtysh basin. Thus, Moghulistan encompassed Eastern Turkestan (excluding Hami and Turfan), much of southeastern Kazakhstan, and significant parts of Central Asia [Yudin, 1965].

The name Moghulistan derives from the locally adapted form of the word Mongol – moghol or mughal – widespread in Central Asian usage. However, by the 14th century, the Mongol population of the region had already undergone substantial linguistic and cultural assimilation into the indigenous Turkic milieu, resulting in a predominantly Turkic-speaking society governed by Mongol-descended elites [Yudin, 1965].

The earliest Oirat incursions into Moghulistan occurred in the late 14th century, and beginning from the 1420s they assumed a systematic and recurring character. According to Chinese sources, in 1408 the Oirats seized Bishbaliq from the Moghuls, marking one of the earliest recorded episodes of direct military expansion into Eastern Turkestan [Pokotilov, 1893: 33].

The conflict intensified during the reign of Vais Khan of Moghulistan (1418–1428). As the historian Muhammed Haydar Dughlat later noted, Vais Khan engaged the Oirats in no fewer than sixty-one battles throughout his rule – a figure illustrating the persistent and destabilizing nature of the struggle [Dulati, 2016]. At the core of this confrontation lay the Oirat objective of gaining control over the strategically and economically vital oases of Hami and Turfan – centers of trans-regional trade and political influence within the Silk Road system.

Ultimately, Vais Khan proved unable to maintain his position in Eastern Turkestan. Forced to retreat, he relocated his political center to the Semirechye region and sought to establish marital ties with the Oirat aristocracy, hoping to mitigate the consequences of their growing military supremacy.

Following the death of Vais Khan in a battle against the Timurid ruler Ulugh Beg (1411–1449), Moghulistan plunged into a period of internal feudal conflict, resulting in the fragmentation of the state into several independent principalities. The death of the energetic Oirat leader Esen Taishi, combined with a temporary strengthening of Moghulistan's political structure under Esen-Buqa and Yunus Khan, slowed – though did not prevent – further Oirat advances. In 1472, along the banks of the Ili River, Oirat forces led by Taishi Amasanji inflicted a decisive defeat on the army of Yunus Khan, forcing him to flee toward the Syr Darya region [Barthold, 1963: 89].

The 14th–15th centuries in Central Asia and the Kazakh steppes witnessed a gradual recovery from the severe consequences of the Mongol conquest. Urban life, trade routes, and economic structures began to revive, while local Turkic elites – long constrained under Mongol dominance – regained political and economic agency. At the same time, the great Chingisid domains, unembraced by unified economic ties – including the Chaghatai ulus and the Golden Horde – experienced increasing decentralization, breaking apart into de facto independent states.

This political transformation created a new regional landscape in which multiple emerging powers – among them the Oirats and the nascent Kazakh polity – competed for resources, authority, and control over key transcontinental routes.

On the political map of the Dasht-i Qipchaq, a new state formation emerged – the Aq Orda, described by Kazakh historians as «the first major post-Mongol polity founded on a local ethnic basis within the territory of Kazakhstan» [Istoriya Kazakhstana, 1997: 104].

In the 14th – early 15th centuries, the term Aq Orda in written sources referred to the extensive steppe lands stretching from the Ural River to the West Siberian Lowlands, and encompassing the lower and middle reaches of the Syr Darya – territories previously belonging to the Orda-Ejen and Shaybanid uluses.

Russian chronicles, however, did not employ the term Aq Orda. Instead, operating from the perspective of the Golden Horde – commonly designated simply as «the Horde» or «the Volga Horde» – they referred to the steppe regions southeast of the Ural River as the Kok Horde or the Zayatskaya Orda. Thus, the nomenclature used in Russian sources does not correspond directly to the regional political terminology established in the Central Asian and Kazakh historiographic tradition [Istoriya Kazakhstana, 1997: 104].

The core population of the Aq Orda consisted of Turkic-speaking tribes, including the Kipchaks – the long-established inhabitants of the Kazakh steppes – as well as the Naimans, Kereyits, Kongrats and other groups who had earlier migrated westward from the Altai. The political center of the state was the city of Sygnak. By the mid-14th century, the rulers of Aq Orda had not only severed their nominal subordination to the khans of the Golden Horde, but also actively sought to assert their own claims to the supreme Chingisid authority within the steppe world [Istoriya Kazakhstana, 1997: 104].

In the early 15th century, centralized power in Aq Orda came under the control of the descendants of Shiban (Shayban), a son of Jochi. After Abulkhayr seized the throne in 1428, the polity became known as the «Uzbek ulus,» a designation that later entered scholarly literature as the State of the Nomadic Uzbeks [Ahmedov, 1965: 6; Istoriya Kazakhstana, 1997: 152].

The first documented contacts between the Oirats and the rulers of Central Asia and the Kazakh steppes date to the late 14th century. In 1397, Timur – having recently returned from campaigns in the Dasht-i Qipchaq, the Caucasus, and Rus' – received an Oirat diplomatic mission at Aq-Tash [Sbornik

materialov, 1941: 187]. Evidence presented by T. I. Sultanov suggests that Oirat detachments later took part in the military expeditions of the Aq Orda rulers into Central Asia [Sultanov, 1982: 9].

However, as the Uzbek ulus under Abulkhayr expanded its authority across Kazakhstan and Central Asia and actively intervened in Moghulistan, relations between the Oirat taishis and Abulkhayr rapidly deteriorated. A major confrontation occurred near Nur-Tukay, close to Sygnak, in 1457. There, the Oirat Khan Uz-Timur inflicted a severe defeat upon Abulkhayr's forces, forcing the latter to retreat behind the steppes surrounding Sygnak [Materialy po istorii Sredney i Tsentralnoy Azii, 1988: 215–216]. This episode illustrates the military and diplomatic form of Kazakh–Oirat interaction, in which armed confrontation was directly followed by negotiations and the use of hostage exchange (amanat) as a political instrument.

Following their victory, the Oirats plundered the cities of Yasi (Turkestan), Tashkent, Shahrukhia, and their surrounding districts before withdrawing to their pastures. During this campaign, they captured Abulkhayr's young grandson, who was taken away as a political hostage. According to B. A. Akhmedov, this circumstance compelled Abulkhayr to acknowledge the suzerainty of the Oirat leadership: «the young sultan, under the terms of the peace agreement concluded between the Kalmyks and the Uzbeks, was taken away as a hostage (amanat), and Abulkhayr Khan was forced to recognize at that time the supreme authority of the Kalmyk taishi» [Materialy po istorii Sredney i Tsentralnoy Azii, 1988: 217].

The defeat of Abulkhayr Khan created a favorable opportunity for his political opponents. Sultans Kerei and Janibek, both descendants of Urus Khan – the former ruler of Aq Orda – had long contested Abulkhayr's authority. Leading a significant portion of the population of the Uzbek ulus dissatisfied with continuous warfare, increasing burdens of taxation, and political instability, they migrated to the Semirechye region.

Esen-Buqa Khan of Moghulistan, lacking the strength to resist and hoping to employ these tribes as allies against the Timurids and the Oirats, welcomed them into his territory. Settling along the Chu and Talas rivers, these steppe groups – initially referred to as Uzbeks-Kazakhs and subsequently simply as Kazakhs – established an independent polity: the Kazakh Khanate. The emergence of the Kazakh Khanate and the formation of a Kazakh ethnic identity represented the «logical outcome of the socio-economic and ethno-political processes unfolding across Kazakhstan in the 14th–15th centuries» [Istoriya Kazakhstana, 1997: 146].

The ethnic foundation of the newly formed Khanate consisted of tribes who had followed Janibek and Kerei – including Kipchaks, Argyns, Kongrats, among others – as well as the autochthonous inhabitants of Semirechye, such as the Kangly, Uysuns, Jalairs, Kereyits, and others [Yudin, 1965: 53–61].

Within only a few decades, the Kazakh Khanate transformed into a powerful nomadic state. Under the rule of Burunduk Khan and, particularly, Kasym Khan, its territorial sphere expanded considerably through both peaceful incorporation of neighboring areas and military campaigns into Central and Southern Kazakhstan as well as northern regions of Central Asia. Contemporary sources estimated the population subject to Kasym Khan's authority at approximately one million people [Dughlat, 1999: 287–288].

As the Central Asian historian Mahmud ibn Wali noted: «When Janibek and Kerei Khan established a prolonged presence in that territory, every person – whether ruler or warrior – who grew weary of Abulkhayr Khan sought refuge with them. Especially after Abulkhayr's death, when unrest spread throughout the Dasht-i Qipchaq, the greater part of the Uzbek troops gathered under the banner of the princes» [Materialy po istorii kazakhskikh khanstv, 1969: 352–353].

Once strengthened, the Kazakhs expelled the Moghuls from Semirechye, forcing Sultan Said Khan to transfer his political center to Yarkand in 1514, where he founded the Moghul state of Eastern Turkestan – later known in historiography as the Yarkand Khanate.

One of the major reasons why Esen-Buqa Khan of Moghulistan permitted the Kazakh groups to settle in Semirechye was his expectation that they would serve as a counterweight to Oirat expansion in the region. Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that from the very beginning of its political existence the Kazakh Khanate was compelled to defend its territorial claims and its right to sovereignty in confrontation with the Oirats. This is corroborated by the well-known account in *Bahr al-Asrar*, where Mahmud ibn Emir Wali describes the newcomers who followed Kerei and Janibek into Semirechye as: «They spent their time raiding the Kalmyks and the Kyrgyz, plundering them, and conducting assaults on the outskirts of the settled areas; and thus this community acquired the name «Kazakh» [Materialy po istorii kazakhskikh khanstv, 1969: 353]

Nevertheless, during the 16th century, the principal direction of the Kazakh rulers' foreign policy was defined not by their confrontations with the Oirats, but by their struggle for control over Central and Southern Kazakhstan against the Shibanids, the Moghuls, and the Noghai tribes [Abuseitova, 1985: 38]. The

consolidation of Kazakh statehood occurred in a geopolitical environment where various successor-states of the Golden Horde competed for regional dominance.

Among these, a comparatively powerful polity – the Noghai Horde – emerged in the lower Volga and western Kazakh steppes. Its population was predominantly composed of Turkic-speaking tribes such as the Mangyts, Kipchaks, and Argyns, later collectively known as Noghai, deriving their name from the influential commander Noghai, who held power in the region in the 1270s as a proxy of the Golden Horde rulers. During the second half of the 16th century, internal rivalries led to the disintegration of the Noghai Horde into several independent principalities – the Greater Noghai Horde, the Lesser Noghai Horde, and the Altyul and Kaziev uluses – which frequently waged war against one another [Sychev, 2008: 684–685].

The rapid consolidation of the Kazakh Khanate – largely achieved through the incorporation of related nomadic groups and an assertive expansionist strategy – inevitably brought it into direct conflict with the Oirats. Interaction between the Kazakhs and the Oirats was not limited to military confrontation; it also included resource competition, shifting alliances, and diplomatic mechanisms such as hostage exchange. These practices reflected the early formation of a frontier zone with fluid political and territorial arrangements. One of the earliest recorded episodes of Kazakh–Oirat hostilities appears in the *Tarih* by the sixteenth-century Ottoman historian Seyfi Çelebi. He reports that beyond the lands of Kashgar lived: «A people called the Kazakhs, without towns or permanent settlements, numbering some two hundred thousand yurts. On one occasion, they plundered a district belonging to the Kalmyks and returned to their homeland» [Maloissledovannyе istochniki, 1987: 16].

This raid was attributed to Sultan Tevekkel, whose forces were subsequently pursued by Oirat detachments as far as Tashkent. When Tevekkel appealed to the local ruler, Buraq-khan, for military support, his request was refused. These events occurred between 1551 and 1556, with V. V. Barthold dating the raid more precisely to 1552 [Barthold, 1963: 96]. Such raids and retaliatory campaigns constituted a stable form of frontier interaction between the Kazakh Khanate and the Oirats, driven primarily by competition for resources and control over contested steppe zones.

The Oirat pressure on the Kazakh frontiers intensified during this period. Contemporary Kalmyk historians connect the renewed western thrust of the Oirats to their earlier defeat by Altan Khan of the Tumed Mongols in the early 1550s, which forced a strategic withdrawal to the west [Maloissledovannyе istochniki, 1987: 16]. Thus, regional power dynamics within the Mongol world directly influenced their confrontation with the Kazakhs.

The Kazakh rulers, including Tevekkel, also actively intervened in the internal conflicts of the Moghul polity in Eastern Turkestan, supporting the authorities of Chalish and Turfan – areas that frequently became arenas of Kazakh–Oirat military rivalry [Chimitdorzhiev, 1979: 31].

Under the reign of Haqq-Nazar Khan, the strengthening of Kazakh political structures temporarily halted Oirat westward expansion. Valuable confirmation is provided by the Russian envoy Danila Gubin, who visited the Noghai uluses in the 1570s and reported a notable increase in Kazakh influence in the steppe [Zlatkin, 1983: 309].

The history of Oirat relations with the Kazakhs' other close neighbors – the Kyrgyz – traces back to deep antiquity, to the period when both groups still shared common habitats in the mountain-taiga zones of Mongolia and southern Siberia [Moiseev, 2000]. By the second half of the sixteenth century, the Kyrgyz had begun to move southward into the regions of Fergana, Karategin, and Eastern Turkestan. One of the principal motives for this migration was the increasing pressure exerted upon them by the advancing Oirats [Ivanov, 1958: 67].

Taken together, these developments illustrate the emergence, by the late 14th century, of the first political and military contacts between two macro-civilizational spheres: the Mongol world, represented by the western Mongols – the Oirats – and the Turkic world, embodied by a number of successor-states in which the earlier Mongol ruling element had long since fused into the local socio-ethnic environment.

By the late 15th and especially the 16th century, the confrontation for Semirechye and eastern Kazakhstan became a key factor in reshaping steppe geopolitics. Oirat territorial expansion restricted Kazakh access to the vital trans-Eurasian corridors running through the Ili basin, while the growing military strength of the Kazakh khans threatened the Oirat attempts to secure a stable western frontier. This rivalry fundamentally reorganized regional power relations in Central Eurasia.

Throughout the 15th–16th centuries, Oirat incursions into Kazakhstan and Central Asia were aimed primarily at the seizure of booty and control over mobile and sedentary populations. The retaliatory raids

conducted by Kazakh rulers against Oirat nomadic territories were driven by similar motivations – the violent appropriation of resources and manpower along contested frontiers.

In the early 17th century, the leadership of Khara-Khula transformed the Oirat confederation into a more centralized polity, marking the beginnings of the Dzungar state. Their western thrust brought them into continuous conflict with the Kazakh Khan Esim, particularly in the regions of Jetysu and the Tarbagatai. These campaigns illustrate the transition from episodic raiding to a sustained geopolitical struggle over strategic territory.

**Conclusion.** In the 15th – early 17th centuries, interaction between the Kazakh Khanate and the Oirat tribes was complex and multifaceted. The main forms of contact included military confrontations (major battles, regular raids, and retaliatory campaigns), political and diplomatic initiatives (attempts to forge alliances, dynastic marriages, and the exchange of hostages), as well as competition for resources (steppe pastures, population, control over trade routes). These contacts exerted a profound influence on the transformation of regional politics.

Oirat military expansion stimulated the consolidation of the Kazakh Khanate, which, from the moment of its emergence, was compelled to defend its autonomy against a powerful steppe adversary. At the same time, the strengthening and territorial growth of the Kazakh Khanate limited the westward advance of the Oirats, forcing them to seek new directions for expansion. By the early 17th century, relations between Kazakh and Oirat rulers had evolved from a series of fragmented border conflicts into a stable confrontation between two major forces for dominance in Central Asia.

Thus, Kazakh–Oirat relations in the 15th–16th centuries became one of the decisive factors in reshaping the political situation of the region, laying the foundation for the protracted Kazakh–Dzungar wars of the subsequent era (17th–18th centuries).

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