

FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONS WITH OTTOMAN TURKS IN CENTRAL ASIA (1865–1910)

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Abstract: This article systematically examines the historical, political, and socio-cultural dynamics underpinning the formation and development of relations between Central Asian entities and the Ottoman Turks during the period from 1865 to 1910. The study elucidates the complex interplay of geopolitical aspirations, trade exchanges, diplomatic correspondences, and cultural interactions that shaped bilateral engagements in this transitional era.

Keywords: Central Asia, ottoman empire, diplomatic relations, 19th century, geopolitics, cultural exchange, historical development

Introduction: The latter half of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century constituted a transformative period in the historical trajectory of Central Asia, marked by shifting geopolitical configurations, intensified imperial contestations, and evolving patterns of interregional connectivity. Among the pivotal yet understudied dimensions of this epoch was the emergence and consolidation of relations between Central Asian polities and the Ottoman Empire, which together formed a complex web of political, economic, cultural, and religious linkages. The years 1865–1910, in particular, stand out as a critical interval in which these interactions were profoundly influenced by a confluence of local, regional, and global forces. Central Asia, encompassing territories corresponding to modern-day Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, was simultaneously navigating the pressures of Russian imperial expansion, internal sociopolitical transformations, and the broader currents of modernization emanating from both the West and the Islamic world. In this context, the Ottoman Empire, itself undergoing processes of reform and centralization, emerged as a significant interlocutor whose influence extended beyond immediate political considerations to encompass trade, education, religious scholarship, and intellectual exchange. From a historiographical perspective, the study of Central Asia–Ottoman relations during this period has often been marginalized or subsumed under broader analyses of Russian colonial policy, pan-Islamic movements, or Ottoman diplomacy in the Mediterranean and the Balkans. Nevertheless, a detailed examination of archival sources, including diplomatic correspondences, commercial records, travelogues, and contemporary newspapers, reveals a nuanced pattern of engagement that reflects both the agency of Central Asian actors and the strategic imperatives of the Ottoman state. The establishment of formal and informal networks facilitated the circulation of ideas, goods, and personnel across considerable distances, thereby fostering an environment conducive to intellectual and religious cross-fertilization. Missionary activities, educational initiatives, and the dissemination of Ottoman legal and administrative models were instrumental in shaping local governance structures and societal norms, even as they encountered resistance and adaptation within the indigenous sociopolitical fabric. Furthermore,

the emergence of a pan-Islamic consciousness during the late 19th century contributed to the deepening of Central Asia–Ottoman relations, providing a shared ideological and spiritual framework that transcended national and regional boundaries. This ideological affinity was particularly salient in the context of Russian imperial encroachment, which compelled local elites, scholars, and religious leaders to seek alliances and support from co-religionist powers. The Ottoman Empire, under the leadership of reformist sultans and enlightened bureaucrats, responded by projecting its influence through diplomatic missions, educational endowments, and cultural initiatives, which collectively reinforced its role as a symbol of Islamic unity and modernist reform[1]. Simultaneously, the Ottoman administration's engagement with Central Asia was not merely altruistic or ideological; it was strategically informed by geopolitical considerations, including the containment of Russian expansion, the protection of Ottoman prestige, and the facilitation of trade and communications across Eurasian corridors. Economic factors also played a significant role in shaping these relations. Central Asia, historically a hub of transcontinental trade along the Silk Road, offered a rich array of commodities, from textiles and handicrafts to agricultural products and mineral resources. Ottoman merchants, entrepreneurs, and intermediaries engaged in these exchanges, thereby enhancing commercial interdependence and fostering the circulation of not only goods but also financial practices, contractual norms, and market conventions. Moreover, these economic interactions were often accompanied by the migration of artisans, scholars, and clerics, whose presence further cemented cultural and intellectual ties. Educational exchanges, including the establishment of Ottoman-style madrasas and the sponsorship of Central Asian students in Istanbul and other Ottoman centers, facilitated the transfer of knowledge, administrative expertise, and legal doctrines, which in turn informed the modernization trajectories of local institutions. The interplay between diplomacy, commerce, and culture during 1865–1910 underscores the multidimensional nature of Central Asia–Ottoman relations, highlighting the intricate interdependencies and mutual influences that characterized this historical period. By examining these dynamics, it becomes possible to reconstruct a more holistic understanding of regional transformations, revealing how local actors actively shaped, negotiated, and sometimes resisted external influences, while the Ottoman Empire simultaneously sought to project its authority, consolidate its ideological legitimacy, and adapt to emerging global imperatives. This analytical framework enables scholars to move beyond simplistic binaries of domination and subordination, emphasizing instead the complex, iterative processes through which political, economic, and cultural linkages were created, maintained, and transformed. In addition to these historical and geopolitical dimensions, the study of Central Asia–Ottoman relations invites a consideration of social and intellectual currents that underpinned the period's transformations[2]. The circulation of ideas regarding governance, legal reform, religious revivalism, and educational modernization catalyzed debates within Central Asian societies, fostering a climate of intellectual ferment and critical engagement. Ottoman models of administrative centralization, legal codification, and public education served as referential frameworks that local elites sought to emulate or adapt, thereby contributing to the emergence of a nascent modern bureaucratic and intellectual culture. Similarly, literary and journalistic exchanges enabled the dissemination of reformist, nationalist, and pan-Islamic discourses, which in turn informed the formation of local identities and collective imaginaries. These processes were not unidirectional; Central Asian actors selectively appropriated Ottoman ideas, adapting them to local contexts and negotiating their implementation in accordance with indigenous sociopolitical realities. Ultimately, the period from 1865 to 1910 represents a formative stage in the development of sustained Central Asia–Ottoman interactions,

encompassing a multiplicity of domains including diplomacy, trade, education, religious and cultural exchange, and ideological engagement[3]. By situating these relations within broader historical processes—such as Russian imperial expansion, Ottoman reform movements, and the global currents of modernization—the present study seeks to illuminate the multifaceted character of interregional connectivity and its enduring implications for the political, cultural, and intellectual landscapes of Central Asia. In so doing, it contributes to the ongoing scholarly effort to reconstruct a more nuanced, empirically grounded, and theoretically informed understanding of Eurasian history, emphasizing the agency of both Central Asian and Ottoman actors in shaping a shared historical trajectory.

Literature review: The historical interactions between Central Asian khanates and the Ottoman Empire during the period from 1865 to 1910 represent a complex and multidimensional field of study, encompassing political, economic, cultural, and religious dimensions that have often been understudied in mainstream historiography. Scholars such as Zumrad Rakhmonkulova have emphasized the intricate nature of these relationships, drawing attention to the ways in which the Ottoman Empire sought to project influence across Central Asia through diplomatic[4], cultural, and economic channels while simultaneously navigating internal reforms and external pressures from imperial powers, particularly the Russian Empire. Rakhmonkulova's research, grounded in archival sources from the National Archive of Uzbekistan and Ottoman diplomatic records, demonstrates that Central Asian actors[5], including the khanates of Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand, exercised significant agency in shaping the course of these interactions, actively engaging in negotiations, seeking alliances, and leveraging Ottoman support to maintain political stability and regional influence. This scholarship highlights that Ottoman engagement was not merely symbolic or ideological but involved substantive diplomatic exchanges, trade agreements, and cultural cooperation, thereby facilitating the circulation of ideas, administrative practices, and educational norms that contributed to local governance and societal development. Complementing this perspective, Abduvali Berdiev provides a broader historical context by examining the foreign diplomatic relations of Central Asian khanates across the 18th and 19th centuries, emphasizing the strategic calculus that underpinned their interactions with multiple regional and global powers[6]. Berdiev's work elucidates how the khanates actively managed external influences, balancing Russian imperial expansion with Ottoman overtures, and integrating these interactions into their domestic political and socio-economic frameworks[7]. The synthesis of these studies demonstrates that the Ottoman Empire's influence extended beyond purely political considerations, encompassing religious, educational, and intellectual dimensions that facilitated the emergence of transregional networks and contributed to the development of a shared Islamic and cultural identity across Central Asia. Furthermore, the scholarship underscores the bidirectional nature of these interactions, wherein Central Asian actors selectively appropriated Ottoman models, adapting legal codes, administrative practices, and educational frameworks to local contexts, while Ottoman authorities sought to assert soft power through cultural diplomacy, scholarly exchanges, and religious institutions. Taken together, these works provide a nuanced understanding of the formation and development of Central Asia–Ottoman relations, emphasizing the interplay between agency and influence, local adaptation and transregional connectivity, and the broader geopolitical and socio-cultural currents that shaped the historical trajectory of this important but often overlooked domain in Eurasian history.

Methodology: This study employs a multidisciplinary methodological approach to examine the formation and development of relations between Central Asian khanates and the Ottoman Empire during the period 1865–1910, integrating historical, diplomatic, economic, and cultural analysis within a coherent framework. The research is primarily based on a systematic review and critical analysis of primary sources, including archival diplomatic correspondence, treaties, official decrees, trade records, and contemporaneous travelogues, complemented by secondary literature encompassing both regional and international scholarship. Archival materials from the National Archive of Uzbekistan, Ottoman Imperial Archives, and selected Russian repositories provide empirical evidence for reconstructing the nature, scope, and evolution of bilateral interactions, while enabling a nuanced understanding of local agency and Ottoman influence in the region. The study applies a historical-comparative method to identify patterns, continuities, and divergences across political, economic, and cultural domains, highlighting the adaptive strategies of Central Asian actors in response to Ottoman initiatives and external pressures, particularly Russian imperial expansion. In addition, a contextual-analytical approach is employed to situate Central Asia–Ottoman relations within broader geopolitical, social, and intellectual currents, allowing the research to trace the influence of pan-Islamic movements, transregional trade networks, and educational exchanges on diplomatic and cultural dynamics. Qualitative content analysis is utilized to interpret textual and documentary evidence, ensuring that insights into ideological, religious, and institutional interactions are rigorously grounded in historical sources. The methodology is further informed by a synthesis of prior scholarly contributions, which provide comparative frameworks and interpretive lenses for assessing Ottoman strategies of soft power, cultural diplomacy, and administrative influence. By combining archival research, historical-comparative analysis, and contextual-analytical interpretation, this study achieves a comprehensive examination of the multidimensional interactions between Central Asian khanates and the Ottoman Empire, highlighting the interplay between local autonomy, external influence, and the broader socio-political transformations that characterized the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Through this integrative methodological design, the research not only reconstructs the historical trajectories of bilateral relations but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which interregional networks, ideological exchanges, and diplomatic strategies were operationalized, thereby providing a robust foundation for analyzing the enduring impact of Ottoman engagement on Central Asian political, cultural, and intellectual development.

Results: The analysis of archival documents, diplomatic correspondence, and contemporaneous records demonstrates that the period from 1865 to 1910 witnessed a substantive consolidation of relations between Central Asian khanates and the Ottoman Empire, characterized by multidimensional engagement encompassing political, economic, cultural, and religious spheres. The results indicate that the khanates of Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand actively sought diplomatic recognition and support from the Ottoman Empire as a strategic counterbalance to Russian imperial expansion, initiating formal and informal channels of communication that facilitated the negotiation of treaties, commercial agreements, and political alliances. Economic interactions emerged as a significant facet of bilateral engagement, with Ottoman merchants, intermediaries, and networks facilitating trade in textiles, agricultural products, and artisanal goods, thereby fostering not only commercial interdependence but also the circulation of economic practices and contractual norms. Cultural and educational exchanges were equally prominent, as evidenced by the establishment of Ottoman-style madrasas in Central Asia, sponsorship of students to study in Istanbul, and the dissemination of

Ottoman legal and administrative models, which collectively contributed to the modernization of local institutions and governance practices. The study further reveals that religious and ideological linkages, particularly the shared framework of Islamic identity and pan-Islamic consciousness, served as a critical mechanism for sustaining enduring transregional networks, enhancing diplomatic trust, and promoting social cohesion within Central Asian societies. These findings underscore the reciprocal nature of the interactions, wherein Central Asian actors actively adapted Ottoman models to local contexts while negotiating the extent and nature of external influence.

Discussion: The scholarly discourse regarding the formation and development of relations between Central Asian khanates and the Ottoman Empire during 1865–1910 reveals significant divergences in interpretation, particularly concerning the relative agency of local actors and the strategic intentions of the Ottoman state. Zumrad Rakhmonkulova emphasizes that the Ottoman Empire played a proactive and decisive role in shaping the political and cultural landscape of Central Asia, positioning itself as a stabilizing influence and a patron of Islamic education, administrative reform, and transregional networks. According to Rakhmonkulova, Ottoman initiatives were not merely reactive to Russian expansion but constituted deliberate strategies aimed at projecting influence, consolidating Islamic unity, and cultivating loyal allies among the khanates[8]. She underscores the extensive diplomatic correspondences, financial support for educational institutions, and cultural missions as evidence of the empire's sustained engagement, portraying the Ottoman Empire as a central actor whose policies were systematically designed to reinforce its geopolitical and ideological presence in the region. In contrast, Abduvali Berdiev offers a more nuanced interpretation that foregrounds the agency of Central Asian khanates, arguing that the interactions with the Ottoman Empire were characterized by selective adaptation and pragmatic engagement. Berdiev contends that while Ottoman overtures provided valuable ideological and cultural resources, local rulers and elites strategically utilized these connections to bolster their own political legitimacy, manage internal dissent, and negotiate with Russian authorities[9]. His analysis highlights instances in which khanates modulated their reception of Ottoman advisors, educational models, and diplomatic initiatives, demonstrating that these exchanges were contingent upon local sociopolitical imperatives rather than unilateral Ottoman imposition. Berdiev further stresses the reciprocal nature of the relationship, noting that Central Asian actors contributed to shaping Ottoman perceptions and policy approaches through their petitions, diplomatic envoys, and participation in transregional networks[10]. The contrast between these perspectives illuminates an essential tension in understanding the dynamics of Central Asia–Ottoman relations: the extent to which influence was transmitted through Ottoman initiative versus local adaptation.

Conclusion: The analysis of relations between Central Asian khanates and the Ottoman Empire from 1865 to 1910 reveals a multidimensional and historically significant network of political, economic, cultural, and religious exchanges that shaped the trajectory of regional development. This study demonstrates that these interactions were characterized by a dynamic interplay between Ottoman strategic initiatives and the agency of Central Asian actors, who actively negotiated, adapted, and selectively appropriated Ottoman models to suit local sociopolitical and cultural contexts. The consolidation of diplomatic channels, the facilitation of trade networks, and the promotion of educational and religious linkages collectively contributed to the formation of enduring transregional connections, reinforcing shared Islamic identities and

enhancing the capacity of local polities to navigate the challenges posed by Russian imperial expansion.

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