

5. “Secrets of the Khivan Court.”

The Detainment of the *Divanbegi*-ites

On the evening of 10 August 1913, on the way to his estate in the suburbs of Khiva, Sayyid Islām Khvāja, the *vazīr-i akbar*, or grand vizier, of the Khivan Khanate, was killed by unknown assassins. This was a deeply shocking event. Sayyid Islām Khvāja was a prominent individual who exercised control over the Khanate’s finances and politics, was a recipient of the most prestigious awards of the Russian Empire including the Imperial Order of the White Eagle, and enjoyed access to the top ruling circles in the imperial metropole; he was also an honored descendant of Sayyid-Āta – a prominent *shaykh* of Yasaviya communal affiliation,¹¹⁰ whose cult was deeply venerated across the Khorezmian oasis.¹¹¹ The circumstances of the murder were shocking, also, having taken place amidst the Muslim fasting season of Ramadan, “on the Friday, two hours after sunset,”¹¹² when every true believer was supposed to celebrate the end of fasting with the *iftār*, or the Tarāwīh prayer. Most appalling of all, however, was the gruesome manner in which the murder was committed: in the dead of night, a group of unknown perpetrators set up an ambush, pulled the grand vizier out of his phaeton, and stabbed both him and his coachman multiple times.¹¹³ Strangely enough, on the night in question the grand vizier’s carriage was not escorted by guards, who on previous occasions generally

¹¹⁰ Hasan-Murād Laffasī, *Ta’rīkh-i gulshan*, fol. 45a; Shioya, “Povorot and the Khanate of Khiva”, p. 238.

¹¹¹ On the status of Sayyid-Āta’s descendants in early modern Khorezm see Devin DeWeese, “The Sayyid Āta’i Presence in Khwārazm during the 16th and Early 17th Centuries”, in Devin DeWeese (ed.), *Studies on Central Asian History: In Honour of Yuri Bregel* (Bloomington, Indiana: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 2001), pp. 245–281.

¹¹² Hasan-Murād Laffasī, *Ta’rīkh-i gulshan*, fol. 43b; Baltaev, *Khwārazm ta’rīkhīga matir’iallar*, fol. 5b.

¹¹³ Hasan-Murād Laffasī, *Ta’rīkh-i gulshan*, fols. 43a-45a; Baltaev, *Khwārazm ta’rīkhīga matir’iallar*, fol. 6a.

accompanied the high-ranking dignitary on his journeys;¹¹⁴ his most reliable bodyguard, a certain Bābā Jān Qātfān, was also not with his patron that evening,¹¹⁵ and even the hapless coachman was a last-minute replacement for the grand vizier's usual driver.¹¹⁶ No less striking perhaps was the fact that the grand vizier's valuables (including a diamond ring worth 10,000 roubles) and 750 roubles in cash were left untouched at the scene of the crime.¹¹⁷ This was a daring, targeted assassination, undertaken furthermore by people who may have had access to insider information about the grand vizier's movements. And it happened almost under the nose of the ADO Commandant Lykoshin, who was supposed to keep a watchful eye on events in the neighboring Khanate.

The news of Sayyid Islām Khvāja's assassination caused a great outcry, both in Khiva and far beyond its borders. Sympathetic telegrams to the Khivan authorities arrived from all over the empire, including from members of the ruling house of Romanov and senior figures in the Russian government.¹¹⁸ At the same time, the imperial authorities embarked upon an investigation of the affair, dispatching a commission to Khiva, headed by the Chief of the Asiatic Department of the Russian General Staff, General Sergei Tseil. Tseil's investigation must have been assisted by the fact that the wounded coachman was able to make a recovery and to identify several of the attackers, who were alleged to be associated with high-ranking officials at the Khivan court and, according to some speculations, even with Isfandiyār Khān himself.¹¹⁹ Despite the coachman's testimony, however, the commission concluded that it was "unable to track

¹¹⁴ A. V. Samsonov, *G. Ministru Inostrannykh Del. 11.11.1913*; O'zMA, f. I-2, op. 1, d. 343, l. 3;

¹¹⁵ Baltaev, *Khvārazm ta'rīkhīga matir'iallar*, fol. 6b.

¹¹⁶ Samsonov, *G. Ministru Inostrannykh Del*, l. 3.

¹¹⁷ Samsonov, *G. Ministru Inostrannykh Del*, ll. 3 ob.–4.

¹¹⁸ Samsonov, *G. Ministru Inostrannykh Del*, ll. 7–7 ob.

¹¹⁹ Baltaev, *Khvārazm ta'rīkhīga matir'iallar*, fols. 6b–7a; Madaminov-Laffasī, *Otryki iz istorii Khivinskogo khanstva*, ll. 164–163 ob.; Jum'a Niyāz Hājīr Babaniyazov, *Isfandiyār Khān davrinīng vāqi'alārī*, fols. 11b–12b; Samsonov, *G. Ministru Inostrannykh Del*, ll. 5ob.–6ob.

down the perpetrators.” Notwithstanding all the attention that it attracted, this high-profile case remained unsolved, and has continued thus down to the present day, even while continuing to generate mystery, rumors, and speculations.¹²⁰

The murder of Sayyid Islām Khvāja occurred a year after Lykoshin had finished writing his *Zapiska*. Nevertheless, both this latter work and subsequent reports that Lykoshin dispatched to the Turkestan Governor-General may help to shed light on the circumstances that gave rise to Sayyid Islām Khvāja’s unfortunate end. By examining certain episodes described by Lykoshin such as the Khan’s detainment of the so-called *Divanbegi*-ites’ faction of courtiers, we are able to reconstruct the political dynamics of the Khivan protectorate, and to trace in finer detail the activities of various factions and individuals who operated at the Khivan court. As we shall see, Sayyid Islām Khvāja’s death seems to have served the interests of numerous individuals and groups: the newly-enthroned Khan, who had been seeking to emancipate himself from his chief minister; certain factions at court, who had found themselves in bad odor with the powerful grand-vizier; and, perhaps most suprisingly, the colonial and imperial authorities, who seem to have been worried that Sayyid Islām Khvāja was monopolizing power and authority in his own hands. In order to make better sense of this developments, let us turn back to the events which unfolded a few years earlier.

On 16 August 1910, the Qonghrat monarch Muḥammad Raḥīm Khān II had died at his palace in Khiva at the age of 66, following a 46-year-long reign. His son Sayyid Isfandiyār Khān ascended the throne. The reign of the new ruler brought about certain reshuffles in the higher echelons of the Khanate’s political hierarchy. As outlined above in section 1 of the Introduction, Sayyid Islām Khvāja, a maternal uncle as well as father-in-law of the Khan, was promoted

¹²⁰ Recently in Uzbekistan Sayyid Islām Khvāja’s assassination has become the subject of a film adaptation by the *O‘zbekkino* film company, see ““Islomxo‘ja” filmning yopiq taqdimoti bo‘lib o‘tdi”, *Kun.uz* online-newspaper, 16.08.2018 (<https://kun.uz/uz/news/2018/08/16/islomhuza-filmning-epik-takdimoti-bulib-utdi>).

to the office of *vazīr-i akbar* (grand vizier). This made him now the most powerful dignitary in the Khanate.¹²¹

Isfandiyār Khān's accession to the Khivan throne was soon followed by a string of bizarre murders of individuals who were variously associated in some way with the previous Khan's financial affairs. Thus, on 14 January 1911, a certain Davlat Kildī Dūghma was brutally assassinated in mysterious circumstances. According to Khivan authors, Davlat Kildī Dūghma had been the closest confidant (*maḥram*) of the late Muḥammad Raḥīm Khān II, especially in the last years of his life.¹²² Although the victim's youngest wife was able to recognize and name the perpetrators, the investigation ultimately determined that in fact she was the guilty party, and sentenced her to death.¹²³ In the meanwhile, a second confidant of the late Khān called Davlat Murād Maḥram, who reportedly was connected with his former patron's financial dealings, was arrested, and his property confiscated into the treasury.¹²⁴ More surprisingly, perhaps, the property of the murdered Davlat Kildī Dūghma was also confiscated in the same manner.¹²⁵ The Khivan authors make quite clear that the principal beneficiaries of these developments were Isfandiyār Khan and his grand vizier Sayyid Islām Khvāja.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Laffāsī, *Ta'rikh-i gulshan*, fol. 5b.; Baltaev, *Khwārazm ta'rikhīga matir'iallar*, fol. 4b.

¹²² Laffāsī, *Ta'rikh-i gulshan*, fol. 9b.; 'Abdullāh Baltaev, *Daftar* (no 4), MS Khiva, Private collection, fol. 2.

¹²³ For a more detailed account of events, see Baltaev, *Daftar* (no 4), fols. 2b–4b; Laffāsī, *Ta'rikh-i gulshan*, fols. 9b–10a.

¹²⁴ According to Lykoshin, Davlat Murād Maḥram, better known by his sobriquet Tāza Maḥram, was the closest confidant of the late Khan, see Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestantskomu General-gubernatoru*, 22.12.1912, no. 62; O'zMA, f. I-2, op. 1, d. 289, l. 209.

¹²⁵ Laffāsī, *Ta'rikh-i gulshan*, fols. 10a–10b.

¹²⁶ Laffāsī, *Ta'rikh-i gulshan*, fols. 10a–10b; Baltaev, *Daftar* (no 4), fol. 2b.



Muḥammad Raḥīm Khān II (in center) and the Heir Sayyid Isfandiyār Tūra (to his right) in St. Petersburg, 1896. The members of the Khan's retinue: Mat-Murād Divānbīgī (in the front row first from the right); his eldest son Ḥusayn Muḥammad Bāy (second row, third from the left) and Sayyid Islām Khvāja (second row, first from the left).

Photo credit: IQDM, inv. no. is not indicated

The Russian colonial authorities in Petro-Aleksandrovsk and in Tashkent alike seem to have been unaware of this bizarre set of events, or otherwise preferred to turn a blind eye to what was going on at the Khivan court. Such a state of affairs continued until December 1911, when all of a sudden a group of nine Khivan courtiers and high-ranking officials were subjected to detention and the expropriation of their properties on charges of high treason.¹²⁷ This group of disgraced dignitaries would be referred to in the subsequent colonial records as the *Divanbegi*-ites, this name alluding to the fact that the most prominent among them were the sons of Mat-Murād Divānbīgī, at one time the most influential figure on the Khivan political landscape.¹²⁸ With Isfandiyār Khān's accession to

¹²⁷ For the list of the high-ranking dignitaries subjected to persecution or detention on that occasion, see Laffasī, *Ta'riḫ-i gulshan*, fol. 17b.

¹²⁸ On this individual see also *supra*, pp. 22–23

authority, these aforementioned three sons, who had started their court career during the reign of the late Muḥammad Raḥīm Khān II, now seem to have strengthened their position. The eldest brother, Ḥusayn Muḥammad Bāy, managed to retain the office of *Divānbīgī*, while his brother Shaykh Nazar Bāy secured promotion to the office of *Yasāvulbāshī*, with responsibility for the armed forces and the local militia of the Khanate;¹²⁹ the third brother Āmān Kildī Bāy, meanwhile, was among the reigning Khan's closest confidants.¹³⁰ The pretext for these individuals' arrest was that they had submitted to the Khan a written petition whose contents apparently impugned the reputation of the Khan himself and his grand vizier Sayyid Islām Khvāja. But if we are to make sense of what was really going on here, we need a bit more contextual background.

In 1911, soon after ascending the throne, Isfandiār Khān undertook his first visit to meet the Russian emperor in St. Petersburg; he was accompanied on this journey by a retinue of thirty people, including the most prominent dignitaries in the Khanate.¹³¹ After meeting with Russian emperor Nicholas II, the members of the Khivan delegation proceeded to Pyatigorsk, in the Caucasus, from where the Khan and most of his retinue headed back to Khiva. However, his grand-vizier Sayyid Islām Khvāja remained behind: on the advice of doctors, he decided to tarry longer at this Caucasian resort.¹³² This decision was to have fateful consequences: Sayyid

¹²⁹ For more on the status the position of *Yasāvulbāshī* in early 20th-century Khiva, see: Sartori and Abdurasulov, *Seeking Justice at the Court of the Khans of Khiva*, pp. 21–35.

¹³⁰ Laffasī, *Ta'riḥ-i gulshan*, fol. 5b; Jum'a Niyāz Ḥājji Babaniiazov, *Isfandiār Khān davrining vāqi'alārī*, fol. 4b.

¹³¹ For the list of the officials who accompanied Isfandiār Khān on his trip to St. Petersburg in 1911, see Laffasī, *Ta'riḥ-i gulshan*, fols. 12b–13a; Pahlavān Niyāz Ḥājji Yusupov. [*Khāṭiralar*]. MS Khiva, Private Collection of Anvar Otaboev, fol. 8; Jum'a Niyāz Ḥājji Babaniyazov, *Isfandiār Khān davrining vāqi'alārī*, fol. 5a.

¹³² The Khivan contemporary author Pahlavān Niyāz Ḥājji Yusupov, who was also in the Khān's retinue during the trip, later in his memoirs would recall the moment in Pyatigorsk when he came to say goodbye to Sayyid Islām Khvāja before leaving for Khiva. It turned out to be a tearful goodbye, as both of them

Islām Khvāja's absence from Khiva, coupled with the rumors of a sharp deterioration of his health, seem to have pushed opposing courtly factions to act.¹³³

It was at this moment that the aforementioned petition signed by the sons of Mat-Murād Divānbīgī and other courtiers was submitted to the Khivan ruler.¹³⁴ Surprisingly, perhaps, the text of the petition itself has been never aired, either in the colonial records or in subsequent scholarship. Even when General A.S. Galkin upon his visit to Khiva in August 1912 made clear that he wished to familiarize himself with the content of the petition, his request was denied by the Khivan Khan on the pretext that the text in question contained some insulting expressions that might tarnish the prestige of the Khivan ruler.¹³⁵ Luckily for us, though, the content of the petition is reproduced in a text by the Khivan author Ḥasan-Murād Laffasī, who during the period in question acted as court scribe, and belonged to the cohort of court historians.¹³⁶ In Laffasī's rendering of the text, the authors of the petition¹³⁷ seem to have been unhappy with the the upcoming reform measures that had been introduced by the Khivan authorities earlier in September 1910 and which, according to its designers – Sayyid Islām Khvāja and Isfandyār Khān –, “aimed at the abolition of some of the oldest existing aspects of the present

by that juncture seem to have been aware of the grand vizier's serious ailment, see Pahlavān Niyāz Ḥājji Yusupov, *Khāṭiralar*, fol. 10b.

¹³³ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.11.1912, no. 53; O'zMA, f. I-2, op. 1, d. 289, l. 167 ob.

¹³⁴ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.11.1912, no. 53, l. 167 ob.

¹³⁵ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.08.1912, no. 43, ll. 134–136.

¹³⁶ A brief account of Laffasī's biography can be found in Polvonnazar Bobojonov ed., *Laffasiy, Tazkirai shuaro* (Urganch: Xorazm, 1992), pp. 116–118.

¹³⁷ Along with the three aforementioned sons of Divānbīgī, the petition also was signed by a further six of the Khanate's high-ranking dignitaries. See the full list of the signatories in Laffasī, *Ta'rikh-i gulshan*, fol. 16a; Jum'a Niyāz Ḥājji Babaniyazov, *Isfandiyār Khān davrinīng vāqi'alārī*, fol. 6a.

order that are burdensome to the people”.¹³⁸ Recognizing that the former method for calculating land taxes “was extremely burdensome”, the program of reforms (*dastūr al-‘amal*; adopted in January 1911) suggested that the Khanate’s principal land tax (*sālghūt*) should be calculated on the basis of a newly designed land survey. Then, in accordance with the actual size of land plots a fixed rate per each *ṭanāp* of cultivated land should be imposed.¹³⁹ So, the petitioners argued that these measures as well as the respective instructions issued by Sayyid Islām Khvāja to local governors,¹⁴⁰ “are at odds with older customs of the country and with Sharī‘a”, and are “harmful for [the essence of] our religion”.¹⁴¹ They further claimed that Khivan state treasury funds were being spent on “the lecherous affairs” of Sayyid Islām Khvāja himself and his confidants. As perhaps is to be expected, the petitioners made clear that the Khan was in no way to be blamed for this state of affairs, and instead attributed all responsibility to the *vazīr-i akbar* alone, whose ongoing reform activities, they claimed, were causing discontent among the population, so that everyone in the Khanate “now speaks out openly [against the reforms] and blames Islām Khvāja for that”.¹⁴²

After receiving the petition, Isfandiyār Khān, who according to some authors’ telling was already tiring of Sayyid Islām Khvāja’s tutelage, opted not to undertake any immediate measures,

¹³⁸ Isfandiyār Khān, *Manifest Khivinskogo Khana Isfandiār Bakhadur Khana o predlozhennykh im reformakh v Khivinskom Khanstve*, MS. St. Petersburg, OR RNB, f. 1240, d. 119, l. 1. For more on the reform program and its implementation, see Abdurasulov and Sartori, “Neopredelennost’ kak politika”, pp. 118–164.

¹³⁹ *Ob’iasnitel’naia zapiska o reformakh, predpologaemykh i chast’iu osushchestvlenykh Khanom Khivinskim*; O’zMA, f. I-1, op. 31, d. 1104, ll. 2–8.

¹⁴⁰ As reported by the local authors, Sayyid Islām Khvāja dispatched sets of written instructions (*ṭalab-nāma*) to the provincial authorities in each district of the Khanate, providing detailed guidance on how to comply with the implementation of the program of reform, see for instance, Laffāsī, *Ta’rīkh-i gulshan*, fols. 11a–12a. For the text of one such set of instructions dispatched to the authorities of the town of Astana, see: O’zMA, f. I-125, op. 1, d. 579, ll. 1–2 ob.

¹⁴¹ See: Laffāsī, *Ta’rīkh-i gulshan*, fols. 16a–17b.

¹⁴² See: Laffāsī, *Ta’rīkh-i gulshan*, fols. 16a–17b.

and decided instead to keep hold of the petition until the time was right.¹⁴³ Meanwhile, Sayyid Islām Khvāja returned to Khiva from the Caucasus safe and sound, and Isfandiyār Khān continued for the moment to be outwardly supportive of his grand vizier. As would transpire from subsequent developments, the Khan was already weary of the vizier's guardianship, yet his position was not strong enough to speak out against this mighty statesman. Sayyid Islām Khvāja's authority within the Khanate seemed to remain impregnable, and he seemed also to enjoy the ongoing support of the Russian authorities, who considered him as a guarantor of the successful implementation of the scheduled reform program. Soon after his arrival back in Khiva, therefore, moves got underway to investigate the aforementioned petition as a supposed "crime against the state" which "sought to encroach on the power of the Khan himself".¹⁴⁴ As a result most of the petitioners, including Mat-Murād Divānbīgī's three sons, were detained on the Khan's orders, while their considerable properties were confiscated almost in full.¹⁴⁵ It was perhaps not accidental that this confiscation of property coincided with a large-scale project of construction works (such as construction of a hospital, telegraph-postal office, madrasas, and various other buildings) in Khiva and its suburbs launched by the Khan and his grand vizier, which required a massive injection of funds.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Laffasi, *Ta'riḫ-i gulshan*, fol. 17b.

¹⁴⁴ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.08.1912, no. 43, ll. 134–134 ob. idem, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.11.1912, no. 53, l. 167 ob.

¹⁴⁵ Pahlavān Niyāz Hājji Yusupov, *Khātiralār*, fol. 13b; Laffasi, *Ta'riḫ-i gulshān*, fols. 18a–18b; Jum'a Niyāz Hājji Babaniyazov, *Isfandiyār Khān davrinīng vāqi 'alārī*, fol. 7b.; according to Lykoshin's inquiry the property of the *Divan-begī*-ites was confiscated in full, including their wives' jewelry items, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.08.1912, no. 43, l. 135.

¹⁴⁶ In 1911 the Khivan authorities launched a large-scale project of construction works in one of the Khivan suburbs called Tash-Kupruk. Lykoshin, following his visit to that area, which came to be regarded as New Khiva (*Novaia Khiva*, or *Tāza Khīva*, in vernacular sources), noted a large Khanal madrasa, hospital, and post office, as well as a new palace for the Khan, see *infra*, *Занука*, pp. 219–221; see also: Jum'a Niyāz Hājji Babaniyazov, *Isfandiyār Khān davrinīng vāqi 'alārī*,

This, then, was what was happening at the Khivan court. Let us now consider the role of the Russian authorities in these events. The arrest of the *Divanbegi*-ites not only took the Russian colonial authorities by complete surprise,¹⁴⁷ but it also appears to have been a matter of major concern for the Russian authorities more generally, both in the colony and in the metropole. The ostensible reason for such “concerns” was the fact that Ḥusayn Muḥammad Bāy Divānbīgī, the leader of the *Divanbegi*-ite faction, had previously been appointed by the Russian Emperor to the honorary rank of lieutenant colonel of the Russian army.¹⁴⁸ The blow to this individual’s authority and standing was thus regarded by the Russian authorities as a calculated affront to the “prestige of Russian power”. But Russian disquiet went further than this. The Russian authorities took the view that the arrest of the *Divanbegi*-ites was a conspiracy initiated by Sayyid Islām Khvāja so as to undermine the position of his rival factions at the court.¹⁴⁹ In light of this view, the Russians started to fret about the concentration of political power and authority in one man’s hands – even if the person in question was entirely loyal to the imperial regime.¹⁵⁰ This is perhaps why this seemingly insignificant case of internal court wrangling gave rise to serious concerns in both Tashkent and St Petersburg. In the wake of these

fols. 11a–11b. As Lykoshin and some contemporary authors report, the new edifices required substantial amounts of money and the Khivan treasury constantly experienced shortages of funds for this purpose: see infra, *Žanucka*, pp. 225–226; Baltaev, *Khvārazm ta’rikhīga matir’iallar*, fol. 5a.

¹⁴⁷ As a certain Vasil’ev, then the assistant to the ADO’s Commandant, reported at that time, he learned about the events at the Khivan court due to “occasional rumors alone”: see, Vasil’ev, *Diplomaticheskomu chinovniku pri Turkestan-skom General-gubernatore Baranovskomu*, 06.12.1911, no. 19; O’zMA, f. I-2, op. 1, d. 289, ll. 194–194 ob.

¹⁴⁸ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestan-skomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.08.1912, no. 43, l. 136; Pahlavān Niyāz Hājji Yusupov, *Khājiralar*, fol. 8; Jum’a Niyāz Hājji Babaniyazov, *Isfandiār Khān davrinīng vāqi’alārī*, fols. 5a–5b.

¹⁴⁹ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestan-skomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.11.1912, no. 53, l. 168.

¹⁵⁰ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestan-skomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.08.1912, no. 43, l. 135 ob.

developments, Major-General N.G. Glushanovskii was replaced as the Commandant of the ADO by Colonel Nil Sergeevich Lykoshin. Soon after, in August 1912, General-Lieutenant A.S. Galkin, then the Military Governor of the Syr-Darya Province, was dispatched to Khiva to lead negotiations about what would be called “the alleviation of the plight of the disgraced courtiers”.¹⁵¹ The main goal of General-Lieutenant Galkin’s mission to Khiva was “to let the Khivan ruler know that the Russian authorities have due regard to the fate of the disgraced sons of [Mat-Murād] Divānbīgī”.¹⁵² Although the Khivan ruler kept insisting that the courtiers’ detainment was a purely internal matter, he could not simply disregard the Russian authorities’ intercessions. In the meantime, the General-Governor of Turkestan General Samsonov kept regularly sending dispatches to Lykoshin about this matter.¹⁵³

As a result, the discussion over the *Divanbegi*-ites’ fate also looms large in Lykoshin’s communications with the Khivan authorities over the course of his first year in office as the ADO Commandant. It is perhaps for this reason that he refers to the case as “the most salient matter that has occurred under the new reign [of Isfandi-yār Khān]”.¹⁵⁴ It is not difficult to discern, though, with which party in the conflict Lykoshin himself sympathized. Both in the *Zapiska* and in subsequent reports he makes no attempt to hide his sympathy for the *Divanbegi*-ites, to whom he refers as “talented officials” who have fallen victim to “intrigues”. At the same time he presents a rather crude picture of the Khivan minister Sayyid Islām Khvāja

¹⁵¹ For the account of the meeting held by A.S. Galkin and N.S. Lykoshin with Isfandi-yār Khān on 4 August 1912, see Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanскому General-gubernatoru*, 28.08.1912, no. 43, ll. 123–136.

¹⁵² Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanскому General-gubernatoru*, 28.11.1912, no. 51, l. 184.

¹⁵³ See for instance, Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanскому General-gubernatoru*, 31.08.1912, no. 10; O‘zMA, f. I-2, op.1, d. 289, ll. 189–189 ob.; idem, *Raport G. Turkestanскому General-gubernatoru*, 28.11.1912, no. 51; O‘zMA, f. I-2, op. 1, d. 289, ll. 184 ob.–185.

¹⁵⁴ *Занука*, p. 137.

as someone obsessed with ambition and “a lust for power”,¹⁵⁵ and repeatedly uses the expression “a power-hungry *vazīr-i akbar*”.¹⁵⁶ To justify his sympathy for the *Divanbegi*-ites, Lykoshin repeatedly refers, both in the text of the *Zapiska* and in his other reports, to “the voice of the people”. As Lykoshin puts it, “the people regard this as an unfair decision”, and ascribe all the blame “exclusively to the intrigues of Sayyid Islām Khvāja, who sought to become the Khan’s all-powerful counsellor”.¹⁵⁷ In none of these cases however does he provide possible clues on the representativeness of his sources or the way in which he actually gauges “public opinion”. Clearly, there must have been other voices among the Khivans, opposite to those shared by Lykoshin, and who found themselves on the side of the grand vizier in that conflict.¹⁵⁸ In the light of his tendency to give a one-sided picture of the conflict that unfolded at the court, casting it simply as a tension between “the talented dignitaries” and the “power-hungry *vazīr-i akbar*”, his frequent appeals to the people’s voices seem to be a rhetorical device, employed by Lykoshin here and elsewhere to substantiate his own judgments.¹⁵⁹ He employs a similar rhetorical move elsewhere in his *Zapiska*, for instance while

¹⁵⁵ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.11.1912, no. 53, l. 167.

¹⁵⁶ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.08.1912, no. 43, l. 134 ob.

¹⁵⁷ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.08.1912, no. 43, l. 135.

¹⁵⁸ Most of the Khivan contemporary authors seem to be distinctly sympathetic to Sayyid Islām Khvāja not only in general assessment, but also with regard to the given conflict, see: Baltaev, *Khwārazm ta’rikhīga matir’iallar*, fols. 4b–5a; Laffasi, *Ta’rikh-i gulshān*, fols. 7a–7b; Jum’a Niyāz Hājji Babaniyazov, *Isfandiyār Khān davrinīng vāqi’alārī*, fols. 6b–7a.

¹⁵⁹ His sympathy for the *Divanbegi*-ites does not seem to be merely occasional; General Kolosovskii, Lykoshin’s successor at the office of the ADO Commandant, would recall that in 1914 while assigning his office to his replacement General Kolosovskii, Lykoshin recommended him, as a piece of personal advice (*vyskazal nadezhdu ili, skoree, pozhelanie*), to align himself wherever possible with one particular group at the court, namely the *Divanbegi*-ites: see V.P. Kolosovskii, *Raport Diplomaticheskemu chinovniku S.V. Chirkinu*, 12.12.1914, no. 242; O’zMA, f. I-2, op. 1, d. 35, l. 64 ob.

describing the ceremony of the Khan's listening to people's grievances; here too, in order to emphasize the ostensible backwardness and archaism of the Khanate's legal practices, Lykoshin invokes the opinion of "knowledgeable people", according to whom the entire ceremony amounts to nothing more than the "simplified oral dispensation of justice".¹⁶⁰ As elsewhere, so too here he neglects to indicate exactly who these experts were. As recent studies have showcased, around the time when Lykoshin witnessed this ceremony there already existed a distinct chancellery at the Khivan court, responsible not only for documenting people's claims filed with the Khivan court, but also for managing a massive concomitant paper flow to and from the localities.¹⁶¹ So, either those "knowledgeable people" to whose expert opinions Lykoshin refers were unaware about this mass of documentary output, or, perhaps more plausibly, Lykoshin tended to favor information that confirmed his own beliefs.

In the subsequent months after General Galkin's conversation with the Khivan ruler in August 1912, Lykoshin would meet Isfandiyār Khān three times; during all these meetings the question of "the alleviation of the fate of the disgraced courtiers" invariably occupied a salient place. The Khivan authorities, meanwhile, could not simply turn a deaf ear to the proposals of the Russian official. After all, in requesting mitigation of the disgraced dignitaries' condition Lykoshin was acting not merely as a Commandant of the ADO but also as a representative of the higher echelons of the imperial administration. Isfandiyār Khān therefore faced a dilemma, since deferring to Russian pressure and "alleviating the plight" of the *Divanbegi*-ites risked undermining the dignity of the Khivan sovereign and would be treated by the locals as a sign of weakness. Such a state of affairs, clearly, was not to be contemplated. Instead, Isfandiyār Khān seems to have played for time, availing himself of the protracted niceties and rituals of Khivan courtly life so as

¹⁶⁰ See infra, *Занушка*, p. 132.

¹⁶¹ See further: Sartori and Abdurasulov, *Seeking Justice at the Court of the Khans of Khiva*, passim.

to keep negotiations with the Russian authorities dragging on at a snail-like pace.

Very slowly, Isfandiyār Khān agreed to mitigate aspects of the prisoners' conditions. In September 1912, a month after General Galkin's visit to Khiva, the prisoners were permitted to commemorate Eid al-Fitr, the holiday that marked the end of fasting of Ramadan. The *Divanbegi*-ites were allowed to leave their house arrest so as to attend holiday prayers in the central Khivan Namāzgāh mosque along with other high-ranking officials of the Khanate and the Khan himself. Although the disgraced dignitaries were not allowed to directly approach the ruler, their appearance at the ceremony was regarded by the Khivans as "a token of mitigation of the disgrace" (*tolkuiut kak priznak smiagcheniia opaly*).¹⁶²

With the passage of time, on 6 November 1912, the day of celebration of Eid al-Adha, the *Divanbegi*-ites were allowed to gather in the front row of the crowd which assembled at the entrance of Tāsh Ḥavlī Palace to make a bow (*salām*) to the Khan upon his exit from the premises. As he departed, the Khan briefly glanced at them and ran his hand over his beard, in a gesture interpreted by those present as a token of the Khan's benevolence towards the disgraced dignitaries.¹⁶³ A more surprising episode was still to come. At a certain point, Lykoshin reported:

an old lady came out the crowd; as rumor has it, she was a mother of the disgraced dignitaries.¹⁶⁴ Crying and sobbing, she started cursing Sayyid Islām Khvāja, who out of lust for power inflicted so much pain on [Mat-Murād] Divānbīgī's sons. The old lady also said a prayer for the merciful Khan

¹⁶² Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 30.09.1912, no. 15, l. 160 ob.

¹⁶³ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.11.1912, no. 49; O'zMA, f. I-2, op. 1, d. 289, ll. 177 ob.–178.

¹⁶⁴ Laffāsī provides the name of the *Divanbegi*-ites' mother – Havā Bīka, Laffāsī, *Ta'rīkh-i gulshān*, fol. 18a.

[...]. Such a move by the old lady made a strong impression on the crowd.¹⁶⁵

Presumably for the sake of appearances, the Khan subsequently gave orders for an investigation to identify exactly who had admitted the disgraced dignitaries next to the palace. He was informed, however, that the *Divanbegi*-ites had been admitted at the personal request of the Heir, namely Timūr Ghāzī Tūra. The Khan “made a show of seeming disgruntled”, but explained that, unable as he was to resist “his only son’s request”, he could not help but to allow the *Divanbegi*-ites from that time on to attend the morning greeting at the Heir’s court.¹⁶⁶

Events then began to accelerate rapidly. On 8 December 1912 the disgraced dignitaries were officially pardoned. Ironically, perhaps, Lykoshin, who had continually insisted that the *Divanbegi*-ites’ plight be alleviated and had gone to great lengths to keep track of developments through the use of informants, was now taken un-awares by subsequent events. In a letter that he wrote in January 1913 to A. Semenov, the Diplomatic officer at the office of the Turkestan Governor-General, he admitted that the Khan’s pardon of the *Divanbegi*-ites “came as a complete surprise to me”.¹⁶⁷ In his subsequent report to the Turkestan Governor-General Samsonov he belatedly provided the following details about the pardon, drawing upon information gathered from one of his informants at the court:

[O]n the morning of 8 December [1912], the Khan was busy with receiving the daily greetings (*salām*) from his dignitaries, when without any precautions, or without consulting

¹⁶⁵ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.11.1912, no. 49, ll. 177ob.–178.

¹⁶⁶ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.11.1912, no. 49, l. 178; idem, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru* 28.11.1912, no. 51, l. 184 ob.; similar account provided also by Laffaṣī in his *Ta’rīkh-i gulshān*, fols. 18b–19a.

¹⁶⁷ Lykoshin, *Diplomaticheskemu chinovniku pri Turkestanskom General-gubernatore Baranovskomu*, 05.01.1913; O’zMA, f. 1-2, op. 1, d. 289, ll. 199–199 ob.

with anyone, he summoned the disgraced dignitaries. They seemed unaware about the reason why they were summoned [by the Khan]. The first who arrived upon the Khan's call was Shaykh Naẓar Bāy, the son of Mat-Murād Divānbīgī. [He approached] the Khan, who was sitting on a marble platform ... [Another courtier] Muḥammad Yusūf Yasāvulbāshī was in his ordinary place [next to the Khān]. The Khan told [Muḥammad] Yusūf Yasāvulbāshī to leave the [audience] room. Then he ordered Shayh Naẓar Bāy to take the latter's place, thereby telling him that from [now on] he restored him [Shayh Naẓar] in the office of the *Yasāvulbāshī* ... After that the other disgraced dignitaries were also allowed to the Khan, who announced that he would grant them a pardon. As a result, [the eldest brother] Ḥusayn [Muḥammad] Bāy was restored to his [erstwhile] position of *Divānbīgī*, ... while [Mat-Murād] Divānbīgī's third son [and the youngest of the brothers] Āmān Kildī [Bāy] was re-enrolled to the Khān's Council.¹⁶⁸

Lykoshin was not the only person taken aback by this news; various Khivan courtiers also seem to have been bemused by the Khan's move, notably among them Sayyid Islām Khvāja. "According to information received," Lykoshin reported to Samsonov, "Sayyid Islām Khvāja was completely bewildered by the independent decision made this time by the Khan."¹⁶⁹ Indeed, the once all-powerful minister must have realized how the ground was slipping from underfoot. "This event", resumes Lykoshin, "marked the end of Sayyid Islām Khvāja's absolute authority".¹⁷⁰ At this juncture the Russian officer could barely imagine that he was thus foretelling the end of not only the authority, but also the very life, of the Khivan grand vizier.

¹⁶⁸ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 22.12.1912, no. 62, ll. 208 ob.–209.

¹⁶⁹ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 08.01.1913, no. 5; O'zMA, f. I-2, op. 1, d. 289, ll. 203–203 ob.

¹⁷⁰ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 22.12.1912, no. 62, l. 209.

The circumstance of the *Divanbegi*-ites' restoration to favor unfolded against the backdrop of a sharp deterioration in relations between Isfandiyār Khān and his grand vizier. The Russian authorities' various informers and a number of contemporary Khivan authors observed that following the *Divanbegi*-ites' restoration to favor, it was now Sayyid Islām Khvāja who found himself in bad odor with the Khivan ruler.¹⁷¹ Tensions between the two statesmen seem to have resulted first from financial matters.¹⁷² Ḥasan Murād Laffasī for instance reports that the Khan's decision to embark upon large-scale expenditure to renovate his main residence, the Nūrallāh-Bāy Palace, angered Sayyid Islām Khvāja, who hoped instead to use the money in question for more utilitarian ends, such as the construction of a hospital, a telegraph-postal office and various other buildings in what he envisaged as a New Khiva (*Tāza Khīvā*).¹⁷³ Baltaev, meanwhile, reports that Sayyid Islām Khvāja sought to prevent the Khan from bankrupting the state with harebrained expenses by limiting his expenditure on "personal needs" to a fixed allowance of 2,000 *ṭillā* per month.¹⁷⁴ Such moves were distinctly unwelcome to a Khan who prized personal grandeur above all else.

It is probably not accidental that Sayyid Islām Khvāja's worsening relations with the Khān coincided with the spread of rumors about the grand vizier's "political unreliability". These rumors reached Petro-Aleksandrovsk, where in September 1912 Lykoshin reported to his seniors in Tashkent about certain "secret meetings" that were allegedly taking place at the grand vizier's house, which

¹⁷¹ Samsonov, *Ministru Inostrannykh Del*, ll. 5 ob.–6; Baltaev, *Khawārazm ta'rīkhīga matir'iallar*, fols. 4b–5a; Laffasī, *Ta'rīkh-i gulshān*, fols. 39b–40a.

¹⁷² Baltaev, *Khawārazm ta'rīkhīga matir'iallar*, fols. 4b–5a.

¹⁷³ Madaminov-Laffasī, *Otryvki iz istorii Khivinskogo khanstva*, l. 91; According to Lykoshin's estimation, the reconstruction of the Nūrallāh-Bāy Palace placed a significant burden on the Khanate's budget. More than 72,000 roubles were spent for the new premises, and the price paid for furniture was "far higher", see Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.11.1912, no. 49, l. 175 ob.

¹⁷⁴ Baltaev, *Khawārazm ta'rīkhīga matir'iallar*, fol. 5a; see also: Laffasī, *Ta'rīkh-i gulshān*, fols. 40a–40b.

turned to be the “Lesser Court”, which operated in parallel with the “Royal Court” of the Khivan Khan himself. Most importantly, these “dubious gatherings”, as they came to be labeled in Lykoshin’s reports, were chaired by a certain Tatar called Abdurashitov; participants at these meetings discussed such matters as “how Khiva should treat Russia” and, even more worryingly, “how to weaken Khiva’s dependence from Russia.”¹⁷⁵ News of a visit to the *vazīr-i akbar* by a certain “emissary of the Ottoman sultan” particularly caught the attention of the Russian officials.¹⁷⁶ Whoever might have been the source of this intelligence, he seems to have been clearly aware of Russian colonial officers’ phobias and prejudices. Lykoshin also reported about the increasing influence of the “Lesser Court” that operated at the house of the grand vizier, and especially of the aforementioned “certain Tatar Abdurashitov” on Khivan politics. Nor was it only colonial officers on the ground who were increasingly suspicious towards Sayyid Islām Khvāja: so too were the higher echelons of the imperial establishment – particularly when news emerged that during a visit to the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg the Khivan grand vizier enjoyed “a rather extended conversation” with the Ottoman ambassador to Russia.¹⁷⁷

Lykoshin seems to have played a key role in feeding such suspicions about Sayyid Islām Khvāja. He regularly reported that the Khivan population was ill-disposed towards the grand vizier, on one occasion writing that “among the population discontent with existent practices keeps growing, and voices against *vazīr-i akbar* Sayyid Islām Khvāja’s autocracy are becoming more and more ubiquitous”.¹⁷⁸ He also called into question the grand-vizier’s capability in dealing with Turkmen chieftains, attributing the increasing

¹⁷⁵ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 30.09.1912, no. 15, l. 160 ob.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ M. Niiazmatov, *Poisk Konsensusa. Rossiisko-khivinskie geopoliticheskie otnosheniia v XVI – nachale XX v.* (St. Petersburg: Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie, 2010), p. 366.

¹⁷⁸ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 30.09.1912, no. 15, ll. 160–165.

tensions between Turkmen elders and Khivan authorities to “the highly unsympathetic attitude of Sayyid Islām Khvāja towards them [=the Turkmen], for which reason he is extremely unpopular among the Turkmen”.¹⁷⁹ This struck a nerve with Russian policy-makers, for whom the question of Khivan–Turkmen relations was a matter of particular concern. In Petro-Aleksandrovsk, Tashkent and St Petersburg alike, Sayyid Islām Khvāja was beginning to look like a political liability.



Sayyid Islām Khvāja (d. 1913), grand vizier of the Khanate of Khiva in 1910–1913. Photo credit: IQDM, inv. no. KP 2727.

In late 1912 and the early 1913 the image and reputation of Sayyid Islām Khvāja became increasingly toxic. The constant drip-feeds of rumors and speculations began to impel the Russians to take action. Turkestan’s Governor-General Samsonov wrote to the Russian

¹⁷⁹ Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru*, 28.11.1912, no. 49, l. 178 ob.

War Minister Sukhomlinov, proposing to take “immediate measures against Islām Khvāja’s autocratic rule”, and suggesting that the Khivan grand vizier be expelled from the Khanate. The Minister opted not to take action at this juncture – not because he had any particular faith in Sayyid Islām Khvāja, but because it appeared that other circumstances would render intervention unnecessary.¹⁸⁰ According to Russian doctors, who were treating Sayyid Islām Khvāja, the grand vizier was suffering from open-lung tuberculosis,¹⁸¹ and it would not be long before he died.¹⁸²

With the grand vizier thus owing his political survival to his imminent death, it is little wonder that there was an unsettled feeling in Khiva in the summer of 1913. Laffasī reports that shortly before his murder Sayyid Islām Khvāja shared with some of his confidants a disturbing dream he had had recently, in which he fell victim to a plot.¹⁸³ By August 1913, the situation in Khiva was redolent of a Chekhovian impending tragedy: the gun had already been placed onstage, and it was only a matter of time before it went off.

6. Death in the Darkness: Employing Criminal History Techniques

In order to reconstruct the chain of events related to Sayyid Islām Khvāja’s murder, we must turn our attention to the array of works written by Khivan authors who were contemporaries of the events in question, namely Ḥasan-Murād Laffasī, Bābājān Tarrāh, ‘Abdullāh Baltaev, and Pahlavān Niyāz Ḥājji Yusupov, all of whom accord attention to the episode. Before we proceed further, then, it is perhaps worth providing some details on these authors as well.

¹⁸⁰ RGVIA, f. 400, op. 262/912, d. 62, l. 155, cited from: A.S. Sadykov, *Rossia i Khiva v kontse XIX – nachale XX veka* (Tashkent: Fan, 1972), p. 141.

¹⁸¹ This information was reported by Lykoshin based upon his conversation with doctor Bogoliubov, the principal doctor of the ADO, who was treating the Khivan grand vizier, see Lykoshin, *Raport G. Turkestanскому General-gubernatoru*, 30.09.1912, no 15, l. 164.

¹⁸² Samsonov, G. *Ministru Inostrannykh Del*. 11.11.1913, l. 3 ob.

¹⁸³ Laffasī, *Ta’rīkh-i gulshān*, fols. 39a–39b.