



J. L. Lee

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The 'Ancient  
Supremacy'

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*Bukhara,  
Afghanistan &  
the Battle for Balkh,  
1731-1901*



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On 20 March 1864, Sher 'Ali Khan and his closest advisers went into extended conference, which lasted until late in the evening, to discuss the best course of action against Afzal Khan and other recalcitrant Afghan princes. The following morning, which was Nauroz, or New Year's Day, the Amir ordered his son, Muhammad 'Ali Khan, to prepare to march north against Bajgah and commanded Ya'qub Khan at Herat to gather the Aimaq tribes on the Murghab to defend the frontier in case Afzal Khan attempted to march on Herat (Khafi i, 53-4).<sup>43</sup> Ishans Uraq and Sudur, who had been living in exile in Kabul since the Afghan conquest of Balkh and Aqcha, were brought before the Amir. Ishan Uraq was offered the governorship of Aqcha on condition he won over the local chiefs of Afghan Turkistan, terms which were eagerly accepted by the shaikh. His younger brother, along with other members of their families, was retained in Kabul as a hostage,<sup>44</sup> whilst Uraq was given letters from Sher 'Ali Khan to all the rulers of Lesser Turkistan and three thousand rupees road expenses. He was ordered to proceed to Maimana via Herat, for Husain Khan Ming had recently pledged support for the Amir.<sup>45</sup> Later developments suggest that, in order to secure the loyalty of the ishans and the amirs of the Chahar Wilayat, Sher 'Ali Khan had promised a greater degree of autonomy to the indigenous rulers of the province.<sup>46</sup>

Muhammad Afzal Khan, hearing that his brother had sent troops to Bamiyan, immediately caused his own name to be inserted into the *khutba* in Mazar-i Sharif and set out at the head of his army to reinforce the outpost at Bajgah (Khafi i, 53-4). Prior to leaving, he made a belated attempt to win back control of the Chahar Wilayat by recognising the rights of Ghazanfar Khan of Andkhui, Hakim Khan of Shimbarghan, Muhammad Khan Beglarbegi b. Zu'l-Faqar Khan, who seems to have taken over Sar-i Pul after Muhammad Zaman Khan had abandoned the area the previous year,<sup>47</sup> and a son of Mir Baba Beg who was governing Aibak.<sup>48</sup> Afzal Khan's rebellion, however, was

<sup>43</sup> *ECD*, 12-18, 19-28 April 1864.

<sup>44</sup> *ECD*, 29 April-5 May 1864.

<sup>45</sup> *MA*, 19 June 1864, SLEP:166, no. 58, n. pag. Husain Khan had gone to Ya'qub Khan in Herat to submit to Sher 'Ali Khan and, on his return, had taken back a refugee Mughal prince, Shahzada Firoz Shah, who was wanted by the British for his part in the Indian Mutiny.

<sup>46</sup> *ECD*, 29 April-5 May 1864.

<sup>47</sup> *EDCV*, 24-30 May 1864, P:IFPC/204/73, no. 46 of June, fols. 109-10 has "a son of Mir Mohamed Khan," but a matter of a year or so later Muhammad Khan was in control of Sar-i Pul and it is unlikely that his son would have assumed control whilst he himself was still alive. Muhammad's full brother, Qilij Khan, had fled to Maimana. See below n. 165 for Muhammad Khan's offspring.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, which says he recognised the son of the Mir Ataliq. However, it is clear from the *Siraj*