

## THE PRESENTATION OF CENTRAL ASIAN HISTORY AND SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE WORKS OF ENLIGHTENER AHMAD DONISH

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### Abstract

This article, based on various literature and research, highlights the historical processes that developed in Central Asia in the 19th century, information on astronomy, geography, natural science and education in the works of Ahmad Donish.

**Introduction.** Ahmad Donish — also known by names such as Ahmad Kalla, Ahmadi Makhdum, and Ahmad Devona — was a prominent Enlightenment-era scholar with profound philosophical, social, political, and economic knowledge. He was born in 1826 in Bukhara into the family of a religious teacher. He received his primary education from his mother and continued his studies at a traditional Islamic school (maktab), later acquiring a broad range of scientific knowledge at a madrasa. During his time at the madrasa, he developed strong skills in calligraphy, painting, and decorative arts, and became well-versed in astrology, which brought him to the attention of Amir Nasrullo. As an Enlightenment thinker, Ahmad Donish traveled to the capital of the Russian Empire, Saint Petersburg, as part of the Bukhara Emirate's diplomatic delegations in the years 1857, 1869, and 1874. These visits allowed him to closely observe the administrative system of the Russian Empire as well as the cultural life of the Russian people. He left behind more than ten scholarly works, among which the "Risola yoki Mang'itlar xonadonining qisqacha tarixi" ("Treatise or a Brief History of the Manghit Dynasty") stands out. In this work, he explores the political, social, and cultural image of the Bukhara Emirate from the reign of Amir Daniyalbiy to his descendant, Amir Abdulahad. Before his first trip to Saint Petersburg in 1857, Ahmad Donish received a specific instruction from Amir Nasrullo: "Study the internal situation and the state affairs of that land thoroughly and report it to the royal court. We can learn about a country's external affairs from merchants or travelers," he was told [1,

p.6]. Like every envoy entrusted with national interests, Ahmad Donish was assigned several duties by the Amir. According to the "Risola", one of his main tasks was to gather detailed information about the political and military condition of the Russian Empire, which was believed to be important for the future of the Emirate [2, p.66]. In his writings, Ahmad Donish did not shy away from expressing his critical views, even stating that some of the individuals chosen to lead diplomatic missions were poorly selected. As a scholar, he was known for his vast knowledge, honesty, integrity, and unwavering pursuit of truth and justice. He despised hypocrisy and double-dealing. Reflecting on his own worldview, the Enlightenment thinker wrote: "Since the time I became self-aware, I have always lived freely. I have never, under any circumstances, been enslaved. Even during the periods when I held official court titles and enjoyed popularity, I never gave up my freedom or submitted to subjugation. The letters and petitions I addressed to the king were also free of hypocrisy and flattery" [3, p.56]. An analysis of his major works—"Navodir al-Waqoe", "Risola yoki Mang'itlar xonadonining qisqacha tarixi", and "Me'yor ut-Tadoyyun"—clearly reflects these noble qualities. His commitment to truth and justice is evident throughout his scholarly legacy.

**Literature Review and Methods.** The encyclopedic nature of Ahmad Donish's personality has drawn the attention of scholars from various fields. Numerous studies have been conducted on his life, intellectual contributions, and literary works. For a more structured and comprehensive analysis, it is useful to categorize the existing body of research literature into the following groups: 1) Works from the late 19th and early 20th centuries; 2) Studies conducted during the Soviet era; 3) Research published in Uzbekistan during the post-independence period; 4) Investigations authored by foreign scholars.

**Results and Discussion.** In the 19th century, Ahmad Donish could rightfully be considered the "Abu Nasr al-Farabi" of not only the Bukhara Emirate but of all Central Asia. This comparison is justified by the vast scope of his works, which encompass a wide range of disciplines, including astronomy, geography, astrology, and history—all of which he treated with scholarly depth and precision. One of his most prominent historical works is "Risola yoki Mang'itlar xonadonining qisqacha tarixi" ("Treatise or a Brief History of the Manghit Dynasty"), which can be divided into two distinct parts. The first part presents historical narratives based on written sources and plausible accounts. It focuses on the final years of Amir Daniyal's rule and the reigns of three subsequent amirs: Shohmurod, Haydar, and Nasrulloh. The second part covers events that Ahmad Donish personally witnessed. It provides detailed historical insights into the reigns of Amir Muzaffar (1860–1885) and Amir Abdulahad (1885–1910). The treatise, consisting of an introduction and seven

chapters, analyzes nearly 138 years of Manghit dynasty history. In the introduction to “Risola yoki Mang’itlar xonadonining qisqacha tarixi”, Donish not only reflects on historical events but also integrates astronomical knowledge. For instance, he discusses metaphysical concepts, stating that existence (being) is influenced by celestial bodies such as the Sun, Zuhra<sup>8</sup>, and Mushtariy<sup>9</sup>, while nonexistence (nothingness) is affected by Mirrix<sup>10</sup>, Zuh<sup>11</sup>, and the Moon. He describes Atorud<sup>12</sup> as being related to all celestial influences, and when Mercury aligns directly with Earth, it may cause harm or imperfection. The nature and degree of each celestial body’s influence depend on their positions within the zodiac and their interactions with other planets [4, p.144]. Donish also provides astrological insights, stating that if Jupiter aligns harmoniously in the heavens during a given period, it can bring a millennium of progress, justice, and benevolence. Conversely, if Saturn dominates the same alignment, it could lead to a thousand years of destruction, famine, and hardship [5, p.45]. These observations reflect Ahmad Donish’s deep understanding of astrology and its perceived impact on historical and worldly affairs. Living in 19th-century Bukhara, Ahmad ibn Mir Mansur ibn Yusuf al-Hanafi as-Siddiqi al-Bukhari—widely known by his pen name “Donish”—left a lasting mark on the intellectual and cultural history of Central Asia. Alongside his scholarly and literary accomplishments, he also held distinct and insightful political views. Donish analyzed the causes behind the fall of the Bukhara Emirate and the Russian Empire’s conquest of Central Asia. He attributed the swift colonization to internal feudal conflicts, the emirate’s lack of intelligence on opposing forces, the inexperience of military leaders, outdated weaponry, and a deeply unjust political-economic system. Donish envisioned a free society based on popular sovereignty, equal political rights for all citizens, rule of law, shared civic responsibilities, and the active participation of all social strata in political life. His satirical poems and illustrative works also reflect political commentary and provide an objective portrayal of the Bukhara emirs—from Amir Daniyal to Amir Abdulahad—

<sup>8</sup> Zuhra (Venus) – The word “Zuhra” (Arabic: الزهرة – Az-Zuhra) means “bright,” “radiant,” or “shining.” This name is associated with the planet’s very bright appearance in the sky, making it one of the brightest celestial bodies after the Sun and the Moon. Venus is the second planet in the Solar System, and it is the closest and most similar planet to Earth.

<sup>9</sup> Mushtariy (Jupiter) – The word “Mushtariy” (Arabic: المشتري – Mushtariy) is derived from the Arabic term for “buyer” or “merchant.” This name has roots in ancient astronomical and astrological traditions, where planets were often named based on their movements or influences. Jupiter is the largest planet in the Solar System and orbits the Sun once every 12 years.

<sup>10</sup> Mirrix (Mars) – The term “Mirrix” (Arabic: المريخ – Al-Mirrix) translates to “the red planet” or “red star.” It refers to Mars, known for its reddish hue, and is often associated with the color of blood or fire in various cultures.

<sup>11</sup> Zuh<sup>11</sup> (Saturn) – “Zuh<sup>11</sup>” (Arabic: زحل – Zuh<sup>11</sup>) comes from the Arabic term meaning “the retreating” or “the distancing.” Ancient Arab astronomers observed Saturn as one of the slowest-moving and most distant planets in the sky. In European languages, this planet is known as “Saturn,” a name derived from the Roman god of agriculture and time. In Greek mythology, it is linked to Cronus, the father of Zeus. Saturn is the sixth planet from the Sun and the second largest after Jupiter. It is a gas giant, primarily composed of hydrogen and helium.

<sup>12</sup> Atorud (Mercury) – “Atorud” (Arabic: عطارد – ‘Uṭārid) is the name given to the planet Mercury in Arabic and Persian sources. This name was used by ancient astronomers and is widespread in Eastern scientific traditions.

highlighting the tendencies and key developments of their respective eras. Through this, Donish contributed significantly to the political historiography of his time by crafting well-balanced political portraits of Bukhara's rulers. His encyclopedic work *Navodir al-Waqoye* ("Rare Events") holds a central place in understanding his socio-political, moral, spiritual, and natural-philosophical perspectives. The work reveals Donish as a skillful reformer, historian, naturalist, and universal thinker. The treatise contains a variety of essays and narratives, written between 1868 and 1873 and later edited and compiled into book form between 1875 and 1882—a process that took nearly 15 years. Today, nine manuscript copies of this work are preserved in the Institutes of Oriental Manuscripts in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Russia. *Navodir al-Waqoye* can be roughly divided into three thematic parts: 1. A special treatise focused on national progress and development; 2. First-person travel memoirs based on events the author witnessed; 3. Morally instructive stories with philosophical and ethical dimensions. Ahmad Donish was not only a theorist but also a practitioner of reform. He developed a comprehensive project for democratic reforms, which he proposed to the Emir of Bukhara. In this project, he emphasized that the state should not serve the interests of a privileged few but rather the well-being of the entire population. He argued that governance should ensure prosperity, create opportunities for all citizens, and prioritize the public good. According to Donish, the foundation of justice lies in the moral integrity of the ruler—a leader who is enlightened, knowledgeable, fair, and genuinely committed to the people's welfare. Such a leader, he claimed, must be able to see himself in the place of an ordinary citizen when making decisions. From his perspective, national strength and societal development depend on just governance. "If seen through the lens of justice," Donish wrote, "every person should be content with their own share of the land." His political philosophy clearly anticipates many of the democratic values embraced in modern governance.

### **Conclusion**

According to Ahmad Donish, the establishment of a civil society requires the creation of laws, their consistent enforcement, and the establishment of mechanisms for accountability. He emphasized the importance of strict order in the administration of state affairs. For this reason, he wrote: "It is necessary to enact laws that regulate the behavior of the head of state and public officials, the procedures for conducting official meetings, the relationships between officeholders, family matters, and interactions with other nations." [6,71]

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