

PAPER

THE HISTORY OF FOREIGN TRADE AND THE IMPORT OF PRECIOUS METALS INTO KHOREZM DURING THE LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN PERIODS

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Abstract

This article analyzes written sources and archival materials concerning the import of metals and craft products into Khorezm through foreign trade, with particular focus on exchanges with Russia, Iran, and Bukhara. The chronicle *Firdavs al-Iqbol* provides information on imports from Orenburg, including copper, gold, Chinese silver, and European textiles, while also documenting caravan attacks that highlight the significant presence of lead, copper, and silver [1]. Research by M.A. Bubnova shows that from the mid-19th century large quantities of silver were imported from Russia to Central Asia, with Khiva receiving hundreds of poods of silver annually. Iranian sources reveal that steel weapons, copper, and precious metals were imported into Khorezm, some even being presented as diplomatic gifts to Russian tsars. Diplomatic ties with Iran also facilitated the inflow of silver and gold coinage. Likewise, trade with Bukhara ensured steady supplies of iron, copper, and steel, with archival documents recording extensive silver purchases by Khorezm merchants. These findings underscore the role of foreign trade networks in securing raw materials essential for the development of Khorezm's metalworking industries.

Key words: Khorezm, foreign trade, Russia, Iran, Bukhara, silver, gold, copper, metallurgy, caravan trade.

The chronicle *Firdavs al-Iqbol* provides information about the geography of products imported from Orenburg into Khorezm. In particular, it lists large amounts of copper, gold, Chinese silver, and European textiles [1]. The work also records that on December 14, 1808, a trade caravan departing from Orenburg was attacked by the Chovdur tribe of Turkmens near Kohna Vazir. According to the chronicler, "the caravan men built a fortification out of their loads and fought for eight days. It is said that when their lead ran out, they made bullets from copper and silver and fired them for two days." From these accounts, it can be inferred that the caravan contained significant quantities of copper and silver, indicating that, along with various other goods, lead, copper, and silver were imported into Khorezm from Russia in substantial amounts.

According to the research of M.A. Bubnova, from the mid-19th century large volumes of silver were brought from Russia to the Central Asian khanates. For example, in the 1840s–1850s, precious metals accounted for 22% (equivalent to 150,000 rubles) of all products imported from Russia to Central Asia. In 1891 alone, 171

poods (1 pood = 16 kg × 171 = 2,736 kg) of silver were imported into Khiva. Archival records indicate that in the second half of the 19th century, the export of silver and gold from Central Asia, including Khiva, to Russian markets through foreign trade declined sharply. For example, at the Troitsk fortress the quantities of gold exported were as follows: in 1857 – 57 kg 630 g; in 1858 – 54 kg 572 g; in 1859 – 53 kg 460 g; in 1860 – 141 kg 415 g.

Written sources and historiographical studies note that from the 19th century the volume of gold and silver exported from Central Asia and the East decreased dramatically. In the mid-16th century, the English trade agent Anthony Jenkinson, who studied Khorezm's economic conditions and the potential for establishing commercial relations, described trade in the markets of Urgench and Vazir as extremely weak. Nevertheless, he observed that "the main goods sold in these markets were brought from Bukhara or Iran."

On the basis of sources, it can be argued that in the late medieval period, Iran and Khorasan were among Khiva Khanate's

main partners in foreign trade. In Abulgazi Bahadur Khan's *Shajara-yi Turk* (17th century), it is written that "one caravan went to Khorasan, while another went to Russia" [3]. Similarly, Ogahiy's *Firdavs al-Iqbol* records that in 1804 "two hundred Khorezm merchants prepared a large caravan with many precious goods," which set out from Marv to Mashhad [4]. Archival documents of the Khiva khans show that products such as leather bags, European cotton, sugar, felt carpets, beeswax, combs made of norbut wood, iron, cast-iron cauldrons, copper, and other goods were imported from Iran [5]. At the same time, together with these commodities, steel swords, daggers, copper, gold, and silver were brought in such quantities from Iran that some items were even presented as gifts to Russian tsars.

For instance, among the gifts sent by Khiva Khan Haji Muhammad Khan to Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich of Russia in 1585 were noted bows from Mashhad decorated with gold [6]. In 1615, among the numerous gifts sent by the Khiva khan to the Russian court, "Persian steel daggers" were also mentioned [7]. In addition to raw gold and silver ingots, the khanate also widely used coins minted in neighboring states such as Iran and Bukhara. Merchant D. Rukavkin reported that in the Khiva Khanate "coins were minted from Iranian and Bukharan gold and silver" [8], which indicates that along with other craft products, raw gold and silver were imported into Khorezm from these countries. Similarly, according to merchant Murtaza Ayitov (1753), "due to the travels of Khorezm merchants to Iran, the amount of silver increased significantly compared to the previous year," confirming this pattern [9].

Diplomatic relations between the Khiva Khanate and Iran also played a role in facilitating the inflow of Iranian silver and gold coinage. For example, Sultan Dinmuhammad of Khorezm, as an ally of the Iranian shah in the struggle against the Shaybanids of Bukhara, was rewarded with an annual monetary grant of 300 tumans. The shah granted him the right to collect 300 Tabriz tumans each year from Sabzavar [10]. Similarly, a Khivan envoy who delivered the news of Bekovich-Cherkassky's failed expedition to Isfahan was rewarded by the Iranian government with 72 chervon coins, while Shah Sultan Husayn presented the Khiva khan with 2,000 tumans. These episodes highlight the flow of Iranian coinage into Khiva [11].

The 1843 issue of the journal *Manufaktura i trgovlya* noted that in addition to imports from Russia, products from Iran, Kokand, and Bukhara such as lead, copper, iron, cast-iron ingots, and household items were also brought into the Khiva Khanate [12]. At that time, the prices of gold and copper rose, while the price of silver from Iran declined; gold rose by 15 rubles. According to R. Gokh, valuable and semi-precious stones, carpets, various silk fabrics, gold and silver belts, brocades, textiles interwoven with gold and silver threads, sheepskins, and other items were imported from Iran [13]. In addition to precious metals, Iran exported copper, iron, and cast-iron cauldrons to Khorezm. Some of these cast-iron cauldrons from Iran and Russia were resold by Khorezm merchants in the markets of Bukhara.

Khiva's archival documents note that in the 19th century goods such as iron, cast-iron cauldrons, copper, leather bags, European cotton, beeswax, and other products were regularly brought into Khorezm cities from Astarabad [14]. Numerous sources confirm that in Khiva's foreign trade with Iran, metal goods and raw materials were among the principal commodities. In the late medieval period, Khorezm's jewelers, coppersmiths, blacksmiths, and arms-makers relied extensively on imported Iranian copper, iron ingots, and steel in their production.

Another major channel through which raw metals entered Khorezm was the Bukhara Khanate. As neighboring states, Khiva and Bukhara maintained continuous trade and economic relations, connected by several caravan routes. These routes passed through mountainous areas of the Bukhara Khanate, including the Bukan, Yuzquduq, Chiyli, Kopqontos, Tumanboy, Arslon, Nurota, Ok, Kulchuk, and Susuq Qora mountains, where iron, copper, and

other ores were mined, processed, and exported [15]. The raw materials extracted from these mines were used in Khorezm's metalworking industries from the Bronze Age through the late medieval period [16].

E.A. Davidovich, who studied Central Asian coinage of the 17th–18th centuries, emphasized that gold and silver were supplied to the Khiva Khanate from the Syr Darya and Chirchik river regions, as well as through trade with India, Iran, Kashgar, Yarkand, and China, and by Bukharan merchants. In the 18th century, Bukharan "chervon" gold coins were also brought into Khorezm [17]. In the 19th century, three caravanserais in Bukhara were designated for merchants from Urgench, reflecting Khiva's active role in Bukhara–Khiva trade. Goods imported from Bukhara into Khorezm's cities were commonly referred to as "Bukharan goods." A 19th-century document records that these "Bukharan" goods included iron, steel, and other items [18]. Sources also indicate that steel was imported into Khorezm from Eastern countries. Archival records confirm that Khiva regularly purchased silver from Bukhara [19]. In the 19th century, most Khorezm merchants conducted trade with Bukhara, bringing back silver in exchange for their own goods. For example, records note silver purchases by Khorezm merchants such as Muhammadjon Baqqol from Khonqa (1 pood 30 qadoq 75 miskal), Jumanioz Sovunchi (1 pood 6 qadoq 17 miskal), Bobochitgar's agent from Urgench (2 poods 1 qadoq 20 miskal), and many others, totaling dozens of bars of silver of considerable weight.

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