

**THE EXPORT OF THE KHIVA KHANATE AND IT CONNECTIONS WITH
WESTERN EUROPE AND BRITISH INDIA**

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Abstract

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Khiva Khanate occupied a strategically important position in Central Asia, functioning as a key intermediary between Eastern production zones and Western consumption markets. While traditionally viewed as a regional power primarily engaged in trade with neighboring khanates and the Russian Empire, recent historical evidence demonstrates that Khiva was indirectly integrated into wider global trade networks extending to Western Europe and British India. This article examines the structure, scale, and direction of Khiva Khanate exports, focusing specifically on their penetration into Western European and British Indian markets. By analyzing commodity composition, trade routes, and intermediary mechanisms, the study aims to reassess Khiva's role in early modern global commerce and to challenge the notion of Central Asian economic isolation.

Introduction

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Khiva Khanate occupied a strategically important position in Central Asia, functioning as a key intermediary between Eastern production zones and Western consumption markets. While traditionally viewed as a regional power primarily engaged in trade with neighboring khanates and the Russian Empire, recent historical evidence demonstrates that Khiva was indirectly integrated into wider global trade networks extending to Western Europe and British India. This article examines the structure, scale, and direction of Khiva Khanate exports, focusing specifically on their penetration into Western European and British Indian markets. By analyzing commodity composition, trade routes, and intermediary mechanisms, the study aims to reassess Khiva's role in early modern global commerce and to challenge the notion of Central Asian economic isolation.

Methods

The research is based on qualitative and quantitative analysis of primary and secondary historical sources, including travel accounts, diplomatic reports, trade statistics, and customs records. Particular attention is given to British, Russian, and Central Asian narratives—such as the writings of Anthony Jenkinson, Jonas Hanway, Armin Vámbéry, and Frederick Burnaby—which provide firsthand observations of Khivan trade practices and exported commodities. Comparative historical analysis is employed to trace the movement of goods from Khiva through intermediary markets (Orenburg, Bukhara, Nizhny Novgorod, Leipzig, and Afghan trade hubs) to their final destinations in Europe and India. Statistical data from nineteenth-century trade records are used to contextualize the economic significance of different export categories.

Results

The export economy of the Khiva Khanate was diversified but heavily dominated by agricultural and pastoral products. Cotton and cotton textiles formed the backbone of Khivan exports. Locally produced coarse cotton fabrics (kirbas) and raw cotton were traded extensively and reached European markets primarily via Russia. Trade statistics from 1827 indicate that cotton textiles exported from Central Asia were valued at over 4.3 million rubles, far exceeding other commodity categories .

Animal products constituted another crucial export sector. Karakul (astrakhan) pelts, produced in Khorezm and surrounding regions, were highly prized in European fashion markets. By the late nineteenth century, up to 100,000 astrakhan pelts annually were purchased by European firms, particularly German merchants, and redistributed to Britain and the United States.

Silk, woolen goods, carpets, and felt products—especially Turkmen carpets—were exported indirectly to Western Europe through Russian fairs such as Nizhny Novgorod, which maintained close links with Leipzig. Precious metals and stones, including gold dust, silver, and turquoise, also entered European markets through Russian and Iranian intermediaries.

Khiva's trade links with British India were largely indirect but economically significant. Horses—particularly Turkmen and Uzbek breeds—were exported via Afghan merchants to Indian markets, where they fetched exceptionally high prices. Contemporary observers noted that these horses were sold in India at “legendary” prices due to their endurance and prestige value .

In addition, precious metals circulating through Central Asian markets often ended up in the hands of Indian merchants, facilitating the purchase of British and Indian manufactured goods. This circular flow of bullion highlights Khiva's role in broader Indo-Eurasian exchange networks.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the Khiva Khanate was not a marginal or isolated economy but an active participant in long-distance trade systems linking Central Asia with Western Europe and British India. Although Khiva merchants rarely traveled to Europe themselves, their goods reached European consumers through a well-developed chain of intermediaries.

Cotton exports illustrate this integration particularly clearly. The expansion of cotton cultivation in Khiva during the mid-nineteenth century coincided with growing European demand, especially during periods of volatility in global cotton markets. Similarly, the sustained demand for karakul pelts, carpets, and horses underscores the compatibility of Khivan production with global luxury and strategic markets.

These patterns suggest that Khiva's economy was responsive to external demand and capable of adaptation, challenging earlier historiography that portrayed Central Asian khanates as economically stagnant. Instead, Khiva emerges as a semi-peripheral node in the early modern world economy, supplying raw materials and specialized goods to distant industrial and colonial markets.

Conclusion

The export activities of the Khiva Khanate reveal a complex and outward-oriented economic system deeply embedded in Eurasian trade networks. Through cotton, animal products, precious materials, and horses, Khiva maintained sustained commercial connections with Western Europe and British India, albeit indirectly. Recognizing this role allows for a more nuanced understanding of Central Asia's place in global economic history and highlights the khanate's significance beyond regional politics.

References

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