

PAPER

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF HISTORY RUSSIAN–KHIVAN TRADE AND THE IMPORT OF METALS IN THE 16TH–19TH CENTURIES

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Russian–Khivan trade in the supply of raw metals and manufactured goods to the Khiva Khanate from the 16th to the early 20th centuries. Archival records and travel accounts indicate that despite prohibitions on the export of iron, copper, lead, and steel from Russia, these commodities reached Khiva through contraband and diplomatic channels. Khivan merchants acted as intermediaries, importing cast iron, steel, and copper from Orenburg, Astrakhan, and the Nizhny Novgorod Fair, while exporting cotton, wool, hides, and fruits. By the mid-19th century, Central Asia had become the destination for up to 60% of Russia's metal exports, underscoring its strategic importance. Sources highlight the continued flow of iron, cast iron, copper, and steel into Khiva, which sustained the growth of local blacksmithing and metalworking crafts. Statistical data confirm that by 1909 the Khanate imported nearly one million poods of goods, including over 100,000 poods of iron and cast-iron products. These findings illustrate that trade with Russia was the primary means of supplying Khiva with metals, crucial for its economic and artisanal development.

Key words: Khiva Khanate, Russia, trade, iron, copper, lead, steel, cast iron, contraband, Central Asia.

According to the Russian statesman I. Krylov, in the 1630s the Karakalpaks, together with the Kazakhs, extracted lead from a mountain near the Syr Darya [1]. In the late medieval period, the Karakalpak and Kazakh peoples regularly traveled to the cities of the Khiva Khanate to engage in trade. At the end of the 19th century, the import of iron raw material into Khorezm from the Emirate of Bukhara continued. In the zakat register of the Khiva Khanate for March–April 1872, it is noted that merchants from Kungrad, Chimbay, and Khojeyli brought iron from Bukhara along with other goods. The document records that Qulmuhammad, a Kazakh, imported one camel-load of iron, while Akhundjon from Khoja Eli brought one load of iron [2]. These figures reflect only one month of reporting in the zakat register of Karakalpak merchants.

It should be emphasized that between the 16th and 18th centuries, gold, silver, and other products from the Central Asian khanates were exported to Russia through Khiva, while in return iron, cast iron, steel, tin, and lead were imported. Due

to its location at the crossroads of caravan routes to Russia, Khiva functioned as a warehouse for Asian goods. Through Khivan merchants acting as intermediaries, goods purchased from Iran, India, Bukhara, and Afghanistan were transported to Orenburg and Astrakhan, where they were exchanged for silver, gold, needles, razors, knives, copper, lead, cast-iron vessels, woolen cloth, velvet, fine cotton, mirrors, paper, and other European products [3]. The German imperial envoy Sigismund von Herberstein wrote in 1526 that iron raw material was secretly exported from Russia to Central Asia [4]. The export of lead continued until the first half of the 18th century. Despite such restrictions, various metal ingots were nevertheless brought from Russian cities to Khorezm by different means. In 1617, for example, the Khivan envoy Haji Yusuf purchased in Moscow, by selling gold coins, “five sets of chainmail armor, 500 knives, 50 half-poods of tin, tableware (apparently metal), and other items” [5]. In Russian sources of the 18th century, documents of state significance regarding the export of metals to Central Asia

Compiled on: September 16, 2025.

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are rare. However, metal goods and raw materials were among the main commodities that Khivan merchants carried back from Russia. The Russian envoy F. Beneveni reported that when he was in Khiva in 1724, a large caravan of 300 camels arrived there. According to him, the cargo consisted of woolen cloth, beaver pelts, steel, tin, and weapons, much of which had been brought from Astrakhan [6].

In the 1746 report on trade affairs, the governor of Orenburg, N. Nepluyev, stated that “the sale of lead to the Kirghiz-Kaysaks (Kazakhs) and other Asiatics is prohibited” [7]. Likewise, Orenburg governor P.I. Rychkov reported that between 1762 and 1767, the sale of lead, steel, copper, and iron to Asian merchants (Khivan and Bukharan in particular) in Orenburg and Troitsk was banned [8]. Nevertheless, these prohibited goods were exported through contraband channels. In the 1770 report on the state of trade in Orenburg, it was noted that “Russian merchants always profit in their trade with the Bukharans and Khivans by exchanging copper, iron, and other goods” [9]. This demonstrates that, despite official bans on the export of iron, copper, lead, and other metals, such commodities were consistently traded through contraband.

In 1774, the Russian Empire passed a decree permitting the export of lead, steel, and iron alongside weapons, but only under license. This restriction lasted until 1831 [10]. In 1794, when Major E.I. Blankenhagel returned from Khiva (March 12), he was accompanied by the Khivan envoy Elbars Muhammad-biy, who was instructed to bring back several thousand poods of iron from Russia [11]. This indicates that iron raw material was also imported into the khanate under special orders from the ruler and with the procurement of permits. Blankenhagel observed that Khivan merchants were skillful traders, often raising prices depending on the situation. He wrote: “Previously we could exchange one pood of cotton for one cast-iron cauldron from the Khivans, but now for one pood of cotton we must give five or six cauldrons. At this rate, the government will derive no benefit and suffer great losses” [12].

According to N. Khanykov, who was in Bukhara in 1840, Khivans imported large quantities of cast iron, furs, and leather products from Orenburg [13]. Some of the Russian metal goods (cast iron) imported by Khivans were also sold in Bukhara. This information is confirmed by N. Petrovsky, who reported that “cast-iron cauldrons, sheepskin coats, Russian goods, and other products” were brought to Bukhara by Khivan merchants [14]. The Khivans sold part of the cast iron and cast-iron products they imported from Russia and Iran in Bukhara, in exchange for iron and steel. In 1820, N. Muravyov described Khiva's trade with Russia as follows: “The Khivans mainly purchase fine English textiles, velvet, gold and silver, needles, razors, knives, copper, lead, iron, cast-iron vessels, mirrors, and some paper products. They trade primarily with Russia, sending goods either through Mangyshlak to Astrakhan or across the Kazakh steppes to Orenburg” [15].

The Khivans also brought back metal goods, copper, iron ingots, and other products from the Nizhny Novgorod Fair. A portion of the copper exported from Russia to Central Asia passed through this fair, supplied wholesale from factories in the Orenburg and Perm provinces. In her work, M.A. Bubnova provides statistical data on the amount of copper exported from Russia to the Central Asian khanates between 1824 and 1846 [16]:

1824 – 23,141 poods; 1825 – 13,478 poods; 1826 – 7,029 poods; 1827 – 4,842 poods; 1828 – 13,948 poods; 1829 – 14,602 poods; 1830 – 14,966 poods; 1831 – 11,976 poods; 1832 – 4,343 poods; 1833 – 8,875 poods; 1834 – 4,139 poods; 1835 – 5,254 poods; 1836 – 11,019 poods; 1837 – 5,192 poods; 1838 – 8,279 poods; 1839 – 11,957 poods; 1840 – 9,524 poods; 1841 – 2,184 poods; 1842 – 11,929 poods; 1843 – 10,296 poods; 1844 – 14,253 poods; 1845 – 9,171

poods; 1846 – 7,541 poods.

The quantity of copper exported from Russia varied greatly year by year, making it difficult to identify a clear pattern of annual fluctuations. From the beginning of the 19th century, however, the volume of iron exported from Russia to Asian countries increased steadily. Between 1822 and 1826, an average of 172,000 poods were exported annually; in 1850, the figure was 238,500 poods; and in 1855, it rose to 250,000 poods [17]. By 1854, when Russia's iron exports to Europe declined, exports to Asia increased by 40,000 poods, or 18 percent. By the mid-19th century, up to 60 percent of all metals exported from Russia went to Asia, primarily to Central Asia. In the 19th century, not only Khiva but other cities of Central Asia also relied on Russian metals. Imports included copper, iron, steel, cast iron, aluminum, and other metals. Between 1840 and 1850, for example, 40,000 poods of copper, 400,000 poods of iron, 75,000 poods of steel, 25,000 poods of cast iron, and gold and silver worth half a million rubles were imported into Central Asia through Orenburg [18]. In the 19th century, metals and metal goods occupied a leading place among imports into Khiva.

In his *Travels in Central Asia*, A. Vámbéry noted that in the first half of the 19th century Khivan caravans with 1,000 to 2,000 camels traveled to Orenburg in spring and to Astrakhan in autumn, carrying cotton, wool, hides, coats, and fruits. On their return, they brought back iron and cast-iron goods, weapons, printed cotton, women's clothing, sugar, and leather products [19]. M. Ivanin wrote that in addition to iron, Khivans imported vitriol (copper sulfate) and alum from Russia, which were used for tanning, dyeing fabrics, and coloring footwear, saddles, and harnesses [20]. From the 19th century onward, Khiva's trade and economic relations with Russia became the primary means of supplying raw metals for the development of local metalworking industries. At the end of the 19th century, Chimbay merchants imported iron raw materials from Russia and Kazakhstan. Kazakhs from the lower Syr Darya also brought iron to Karakalpak villages, where it was exchanged for agricultural and blacksmith products [21]. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, iron, cast iron, copper, and other metals, mainly industrial goods, were systematically imported into the Khiva Khanate from the Russian Empire. For example, in 1909 products worth 2,550,000 rubles, totaling 979,000 poods, were imported into the khanate, including 105,000 poods of cast iron and iron goods [22].

The history of metal imports and metalworking in Khorezm from the 16th to the early 20th centuries demonstrates the region's deep integration into international trade networks and its reliance on foreign raw materials. Despite frequent prohibitions by Russia on the export of metals such as iron, copper, lead, and steel, these commodities consistently reached Khorezm through contraband, diplomatic exchanges, and merchant networks. Iran and Bukhara likewise supplied significant quantities of raw metals, finished products, and precious coinage, reinforcing Khorezm's role as a hub of regional commerce. The evidence shows that the development of local blacksmithing, jewelry-making, and other metalworking crafts depended heavily on imported raw materials, which in turn strengthened Khorezm's artisanal and economic life. By the late 19th century, Russia had become the dominant supplier of metals to Khorezm, with imports reaching hundreds of thousands of poods annually, ensuring the continuity of local craft traditions. Thus, the study highlights the economic importance of cross-border trade in metals and its decisive role in shaping the craft and urban history of Khorezm.

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