



## **ECONOMIC LIFE OF KHIVA KHANATE**

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**Abstract:** The Khiva Khanate, a prominent state in Central Asia during the 19th century, had a complex economy largely based on agriculture, handicrafts, and trade. This article explores the economic life of the khanate, focusing on its population, administrative structure, land tenure, and taxation system. Irrigation-dependent agriculture formed the backbone of the economy, while handicrafts and trade with neighboring regions played crucial roles. The khanate's governance relied on a system of taxes and labor obligations, with artisans, traders, and tenant farmers forming the economic base. Despite challenges in infrastructure and external pressures, the Khiva Khanate maintained a functional economic system until its integration into the Russian Empire.

**Keywords:** Khiva Khanate, 19th century, agriculture, trade, handicrafts, taxation, irrigation, land tenure, tenant farmers, labor obligations.

The Khiva Khanate, located in what is now modern-day Uzbekistan, was a prominent Central Asian state during the 19th century. Its economy, largely agrarian, was shaped by its geography, social structure, and the governing policies of the khans. While the region had many natural resources and a strong tradition of handicrafts, its economy faced numerous challenges due to its dependence on irrigation, its semi-feudal land ownership system, and external political pressures. This article explores the economic life of the Khiva Khanate, focusing on its population, administration, land tenure, trade, and taxation, using historical information from the early to mid-19th century.

**Population and Social Structure.** In the early 19th century, the population of the Khiva Khanate was approximately 800,000, although this figure fluctuated as the khanate's borders expanded or contracted. The capital, Khiva, housed over 20,000 residents and was a bustling hub of economic activity, with over 700 craft workshops and more than 200 shops. The city's marketplaces featured three large and 15 small bazaars, showcasing the diversity of goods and services offered within the khanate. More than 50 types of handicrafts thrived, contributing significantly to the economy. The majority of Khiva's inhabitants were Uzbeks, who belonged to various tribal groups. The population also included Turkmen, Karakalpaks, and Kazakhs, each residing in different regions and often managing their own irrigation



systems and landholdings. Each ethnic group lived primarily in specific areas, working to maintain their irrigation canals, which were essential for agriculture in the arid region. These communities played a critical role in the agricultural productivity of the khanate, as each group was responsible for the upkeep of their canal systems.

**Governance and Administrative Structure.** The Khiva Khanate was a hereditary monarchy, with the khan as the absolute ruler. The state was divided into 15 administrative provinces, including Pitnak, Hazarasp, Khonka, Urgench, and others. These provinces were further subdivided into smaller districts, often centered around cities or mosques. Local governance was handled by influential elders, qadis (judges), and mirabs (officials in charge of irrigation), who oversaw social, economic, and legal matters within their communities. During the reign of Muhammad Rahim Khan I, significant reforms were introduced to streamline the administrative structure. One of the most notable reforms was the establishment of the Supreme Council, a high-ranking administrative body that acted as a legislative, executive, and judicial authority. The council, chaired by the khan, included his close relatives and key officials such as the mehtar (prime minister), qoshbegi (chief military official), and devonbegi (minister in charge of various departments). This council met weekly to discuss internal and external political matters, ensuring that the khanate's governance remained centralized and efficient. In addition to the Supreme Council, a Smaller Council dealt with more immediate administrative tasks. This body included the mehtar, qoshbegi, and other officials, who managed the daily affairs of the khanate. The mehtar, as the prime minister, played a vital role in the state's functioning, particularly when the khan was away on military campaigns or state visits.

**Land Ownership and Agriculture.** Agriculture was the backbone of the Khiva Khanate's economy. The region's land was divided into three main categories: state-owned lands, private lands, and waqf lands (endowed for religious purposes). State-owned lands were known as "podshohi" lands, while private lands were referred to as "xususiy" lands. Waqf lands were typically exempt from taxes and were often controlled by religious institutions. The majority of the state's wealth was tied to its land, particularly the irrigated (axya) and non-irrigated (adra) lands. The khan, his relatives, and high-ranking officials controlled about half of the land. Their estates ranged from 2,000 to 3,000 tanobs (a unit of land measurement), with some estates being even larger. These officials, along with religious elites and traders, enjoyed significant privileges, such as exemptions from taxes on their lands. The



remaining land was managed by tenant farmers, who worked both state and private lands. Tenant farmers on state lands were known as "bevatan," while those on private lands were called "koranda." Farmers who worked waqf lands were referred to as "vaqfchi." These tenant farmers were responsible for paying taxes and fulfilling various labor obligations. Despite their economic hardships, these laborers played an essential role in maintaining the khanate's agricultural productivity. The scarcity of water for irrigation was a constant concern, leading to the construction of new canals, such as the Lavzan and Katta Khonobod canals, during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

**Trade and Handicrafts.** Khiva's economy also depended heavily on trade and handicrafts. The city of Khiva, with its numerous workshops and markets, was a center of craftsmanship and commerce. Artisans produced a wide range of goods, including textiles, pottery, metalwork, and leather goods, which were sold both locally and in long-distance trade. More than 50 different types of handicrafts were produced, contributing to the khanate's vibrant economy. Trade with neighboring regions, particularly Russia, Persia, and other Central Asian states, was vital to the khanate's economic health. Goods such as cotton, wool, silk, and dried fruits were exported in exchange for manufactured goods and luxury items. Khiva's strategic location along the Silk Road facilitated its role as a trade intermediary between Europe and Asia, although its economic development was often constrained by political instability and the lack of modern infrastructure. The khanate's reliance on traditional handicrafts and agriculture meant that it lagged behind the industrial advancements taking place in Western Europe. There were no large-scale industrial enterprises in Khiva, and the economy remained heavily dependent on manual labor and artisanal production. This economic backwardness contributed to the relative stagnation of the region compared to other parts of the world.

**Taxation and Labor Obligations.** The economic system of the Khiva Khanate was also characterized by its system of taxes and labor obligations. The primary tax was the "salg'ut," a land tax levied on both state and private lands. In addition to this tax, artisans, merchants engaged in external trade, and pastoralists were required to pay zakat, a form of alms tax. The revenue collected through these taxes supported the state's administrative and military functions. Peasants and artisans were also subject to several labor obligations, the most important of which was the "begar." This labor tax required each household to provide one worker for 12 days of state service each year. These workers were typically involved in public works projects such as the construction of buildings, roads, and canals. Another



important labor obligation was the "qazu," which required entire villages to participate in the cleaning and maintenance of irrigation canals. Other duties included the construction and reinforcement of defensive dikes ("hachi") and the cleaning of water distribution points ("ichki va obxo'ra qazu").

**Conclusion.** The economic life of the Khiva Khanate in the 19th century was a complex system shaped by its geography, social structure, and political organization. Agriculture, particularly irrigation-based farming, formed the backbone of the economy, with tenant farmers playing a vital role in sustaining agricultural output. Handicrafts and trade also contributed to the khanate's wealth, although the absence of large-scale industry limited its economic growth. The khanate's taxation and labor systems, while necessary for maintaining the state's infrastructure, placed significant burdens on the working population. Despite these challenges, the Khiva Khanate maintained a relatively stable economy until its eventual decline and incorporation into the Russian Empire in the late 19th century.

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