



## THE HISTORY OF THE IRRIGATION SYSTEM IN THE BUKHARA EMIRATE (LATE 19TH – EARLY 20TH CENTURY)

**Dilshod Sharopov**

Lecturer, Department of Archaeology and  
History of Bukhara  
Bukhara State University  
d.r.sharopov@buxdu.uz

**Rajabov Oybek Iskandarovich**

Lecturer, Department of Archaeology and  
History of Bukhara Bukhara State University  
o.i.rajabov@buxdu.uz  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15649260>

### ARTICLE INFO

Qabul qilindi: 01-June 2025 yil  
Ma'qullandi: 07- June 2025 yil  
Nashr qilindi: 12- June 2025 yil

### KEYWORDS

*Bukhara Emirate, exile system,  
political punishments, 19th  
century, early 20th century,  
social control, legal system of  
the Emirate, historical sources.*

### ABSTRACT

*This article analyzes the formation, objectives, and socio-political significance of the exile (forced deportation) system in the Bukhara Emirate during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, based on historical sources. In the Emirate, exile punishment was not limited to criminals but was also applied to political opponents, as well as individuals accused of religious or ethnic discord. The article explores the role of the Emirate's administrative structures in issuing exile decisions, the forms of punishment, designated exile regions, and the impact of this practice on local populations. Additionally, changes in the exile system in the context of relations with the Russian Empire are examined. The study is based on archival documents, and written accounts of foreign travelers and diplomatic representatives. Through this topic, the article reveals the unique characteristics of the Bukhara Emirate's legal-political system and mechanisms of social control*

**Introduction.** Following Uzbekistan's independence, new opportunities emerged to reevaluate national history from a modern methodological perspective. This process necessitated a critical reassessment of the negative socio-economic consequences caused by the colonial-imperial systems of the Tsarist and Soviet periods. In this context, it became essential to identify and analyze the underlying factors of these impacts and to interpret historical realities based on a renewed national and scholarly outlook. Moreover, the need to conduct comprehensive studies of past socio-political processes in light of contemporary academic approaches and national interests has become one of the central tasks of current historical research.

**Results and Discussion.** According to the researcher N.F. Sitnyakovsky, who studied the history of the irrigation system in the Bukhara Emirate, there were specific difficulties in the construction and use of irrigation facilities during this period. Several major rivers flowed through the territory of the Emirate, including the Amu Darya, Surkhan Darya, Kashka Darya,

and Zeravshan. However, due to the geographical features of the region, the abundant waters of the Amu Darya were rarely utilized for agricultural irrigation. In contrast, the population sought to exploit every drop of water from the Zeravshan and Kashka Darya rivers. As in other Eastern states, the irrigation system in the Bukhara Emirate was organized by the state. During the period when the Emirate was under protectorate rule, the construction and administration of irrigation infrastructure, as well as the distribution of water across territories, became the responsibility of the colonial administration.

In accordance with the 1873 peace treaty, the territories stretching from the cities of Khujand, Ura-Tyube, Panjikent, Samarkand, and Kattakurgan to Zirabulok, as well as the regions of Shughnan, Wakhan, and Rushan in Eastern Bukhara –particularly the upper basin of the Zeravshan River –were lost. This loss deprived the population of the Bukhara Emirate of their main source of life: water. As a result, the Emirate became even more economically dependent on the Russian Empire.

According to N.F. Sitnyakovsky, in 1899, 32 canals received water from the right bank of the Zeravshan River, while 20 canals drew water from the left bank. Based on the data provided by the researcher V.I. Masalsky, in 1892, there were 25 canals on the right bank and 18 on the left bank of the same river. Taking into account that nine new canals were constructed between 1892 and 1899, it might appear that the irrigation system in the Bukhara Emirate had steadily improved over those years. However, in reality, during this period the population of the Bukhara Emirate continued to suffer from water shortages and a general lack of access to sufficient irrigation.

The newly launched irrigation structures were primarily constructed along the Zeravshan River in territories under Russian control, specifically within the Samarkand region of the Turkestan Governorate. This development occurred because, under the terms of an agreement concluded with the Emir of Bukhara, these lands had been transferred to colonial administration. Although the total water flow of the Zeravshan River amounted to approximately 803 million cubic sazhen (according to Yu.Kh.), only 230 million cubic sazhen were allocated to Bukhara. Since the administration of water distribution along the Zeravshan was handled by the colonial authorities of the Samarkand region, the Bukhara province did not receive a sufficient share of irrigation water. According to the testimony of one colonial official, in the early 1880s, water was not supplied for 15 to 20 days to irrigate the gardens within the city of Bukhara, including those personally owned by Emir Muzaffar.

The issue of water scarcity in the Emirate of Bukhara was not unnoticed by contemporaries. Mirzo Olim Mahdum Hoji, in his historical work *Tarikhi Turkiston (The History of Turkestan)*, provides the following remark, which is by no means incidental: “The water supply of Bukhara is scarce; although water is brought from the Zeravshan River and several canals have been dug, it still proves insufficient during most of the summer season.”

It is self-evident that such a situation persisted throughout all periods of colonial rule. Numerous historical sources document the persistent problems of water distribution, water shortages, and, in some years, the complete absence of water in the Emirate of Bukhara. According to A.R. Muhammadjonov—a dedicated scholar and leading expert on the history of Bukhara, who skillfully investigated the irrigation history of the Bukhara oasis—the amount of water allocated from the Zeravshan River for the Samarkand and Bukhara oases was considered to be equivalent to 42 “ravoq” (a traditional measurement unit). However, this

amount was not fully delivered to the Bukhara region and failed to meet the irrigation needs of the oasis. Moreover, the arbitrary actions of the emirate's officials further exacerbated the issue.

During his father's reign, Emir Muzaffar of Bukhara served as the governor (*vali*) of Karmana. In his efforts to develop Karmana and its surrounding areas, he redirected the flow of the Zeravshan River toward the Qal'ai Bus region by initiating the construction of new canals and irrigation ditches. While this intervention brought prosperity and administrative improvement to Qal'ai Bus and its environs, it had adverse consequences for other regions. In particular, the redirection of water led to acute shortages in the Qorakol area, resulting in the desolation of many agricultural settlements and revered pilgrimage sites. Such circumstances further deteriorated the conditions of agricultural oases. The royal irrigation specialist Z. Zhizhensky, who served in Samarkand during the 1870s, noted: "In the Qorakol, Shohrud, and Vobkent oases, residents were forced to rely either on reused irrigation water or on incidental, unpredictable water sources."

In the Emirate of Bukhara, collective labor mobilizations (*hashar*) were periodically organized to clean and repair existing infrastructure, including bridges, dams, canals, and irrigation ditches. Those who failed to participate in such works were subject to a monetary fine known as the *boqi payment*, which was officially designated for the state treasury. However, in practice, these funds were frequently embezzled or misappropriated. Corruption among administrative officials in this domain was notably widespread.

For instance, according to a report submitted to the emir by Inoyatullo Khoja, the head of a district council, a sum of 2,000 tangas collected as *boqi payment* from residents of the Qorakol district—who had not participated in maintenance work for the Khayrabod irrigation canal—was never delivered to the state treasury. The funds were allegedly misappropriated by Hamza Khoja, a relative of the local *amlokdor* (land administrator).

The proposals put forward by Ahmad Donish—a polymath and enlightened reformer of his time—regarding the diversion of Amu Darya waters to Bukhara and the use of this water to irrigate lands in the lower reaches of the Zarafshan River remained unfulfilled. Despite the establishment of joint water distribution commissions between Bukhara and Samarkand in 1872, which included representatives from both regions, and the development of irrigation projects such as the one proposed by Z. Zhizhensky, the head of the Samarkand Irrigation Department, these initiatives were consistently postponed. The main reasons cited were lack of funding and various bureaucratic pretexts.

**Conclusion.** Despite existing difficulties, the population of the Bukhara Emirate and its diligent farmers demonstrated remarkable resilience and ingenuity in sustaining agricultural production. By adhering to ancient farming traditions, they managed to cultivate essential crops to meet their subsistence needs and contributed to the creation of flourishing orchards and gardens. Their efforts exemplify a deep-rooted agricultural culture that persisted even under challenging conditions.

#### References:

1. Sitnyakovskiy, N. F. (1899). *Zamechaniya o Bukharskoy chasti doliny Zarafshana* [Notes on the Bukhara part of the Zarafshan Valley] (Vol. 1, p. 135). St. Petersburg.

2. Masalskiy, V. I. (1892). Khlopkovoye delo v Sredney Azii (Turkestan, Zakasp. obl., Bukhara i Khiva) i yego budushcheye [The Cotton Industry in Central Asia (Turkestan, Trans-Caspian region, Bukhara and Khiva) and Its Future] (p. 145). St. Petersburg.
3. National Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (n.d.). Fund 1, Inventory 290, File 43. O'zbekiston Respublikasi Markaziy Davlat Arxivi.
4. Mirzo Olim Mahdum Khoja. (2008). Tarikhi Turkiston [History of Turkestan] (p. 191). Tashkent.
5. Mirzakulov, B. (2014). Qorako'l tarikh silsilasida [In the Historical Series of Qorako'l] (pp. 145–146). Tashkent: Chashma Print.

