

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Beyond Written Treaties: Diplomatic Practice And Documentary Traces Of Bukhara's Trade With Khiva And Kokand In The Eighteenth And Nineteenth Centuries

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## Abstract

This article examines the commercial relations of the Bukhara Emirate with the Khiva and Kokand khanates through the concept of "diplomatic practice" rather than through the narrow category of formal trade treaties. The central argument is that although complete texts of special trade treaties between Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand have survived only fragmentarily, the mechanisms of commercial regulation can be reconstructed through a wider documentary field: diplomatic missions, chancery materials, chronicles, customs records, caravan data, fiscal registers, merchant protection practices and archival references. The article distinguishes between two different documentary models: the Bukhara–Khiva direction is more visible through diplomatic chronicles, chancery documents and evidence of merchant security, whereas the Bukhara–Kokand direction is more clearly reflected in customs and fiscal data, especially in materials related to Khujand and Ura-Tyube customs offices. The article concludes that trade in Central Asian khanates was not regulated only by formal agreements, but by a broader system of diplomatic, fiscal and infrastructural practices.

## KEYWORDS

Bukhara Emirate, Khiva Khanate, Kokand Khanate, diplomatic practice, commercial regulation, customs records, caravan trade, Khujand customs office, archival evidence, Central Asia.

## INTRODUCTION

The commercial relations of the Bukhara Emirate with the Khiva and Kokand khanates cannot be adequately understood if they are reduced only to lists of commodities, routes, wars or political conflicts. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, trade among the Central Asian khanates was embedded in a complex diplomatic and administrative environment. It depended on caravan security, the legal position of merchants, customs payments, diplomatic

negotiations, the condition of frontier zones and access to markets.

The main difficulty is methodological. Modern researchers often search for formal trade treaties, yet in the political culture of the Central Asian khanates trade was frequently regulated through practical diplomacy rather than through separate commercial treaties. Diplomatic missions, letters between rulers, oral and written arrangements, guarantees of

caravan safety, customs negotiations, caravanserais arrangements and control over roads often functioned as real mechanisms of commercial regulation.

For this reason, this article uses the concept of commercial diplomatic practice. It refers to the full set of diplomatic, fiscal and administrative procedures that made trade between Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand possible even when a formal treaty text is not preserved.

The purpose of the article is to identify the types of sources through which Bukhara’s trade relations with Khiva and Kokand can be reconstructed. The main research question is: if direct commercial treaties are fragmentary, what documentary traces allow us to recover the real mechanisms of inter-khanate trade?

The article is based on source-critical, institutional, comparative and economic-historical approaches. The source-critical method helps evaluate the origin, purpose and reliability of each source. The institutional approach treats embassies, customs offices, markets, caravanserais, roads and merchant groups as elements of one commercial system. The comparative method is used to distinguish the Bukhara–Khiva and Bukhara–Kokand directions. The economic-historical method is applied to duties, caravan movement, goods and fiscal data.

N. Allaeva’s monograph on the diplomacy and trade relations of the Khiva Khanate is central for the Khivan direction. The author emphasizes that the study is based on official documents and comparative analysis of written sources [1, pp. 4–6]. Particularly important is the reference to the documents of the Khiva Khanate chancery preserved in fund I-125 of the Central State Archive of Uzbekistan. Their inclusion in UNESCO’s Memory of the World programme highlights their source value [1, p. 5].

For the Kokand direction, Z. Madрахimov’s study of trade relations in the Kokand Khanate is essential. It examines

economic centers, internal and external trade, relations with Bukhara and Khiva, markets, caravanserais, customs administration and trade taxes [2, pp. 18–144]. The sections on Kokand’s relations with Bukhara and Khiva [2, pp. 70–83] and on customs and trade taxes [2, pp. 121–134] are especially important.

A. Kholiqulov’s research on the foreign political relations of the Bukhara Emirate is valuable because it reconstructs the diplomatic setting in which trade functioned. His work shows that relations between Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand developed within a complex regional balance. His materials on embassy rituals, the role of the shighavul, the rules of yaso and yusun, and the political consequences of tensions among the khanates are important for understanding trade as a diplomatic practice [3].

R. Alimova’s work highlights the importance of Russian travelers, embassy reports and archival materials in the study of diplomatic and trade-economic relations of the Central Asian khanates [4, pp. 3–4]. This is significant because inter-khanate trade is rarely preserved in one single treaty; it appears in many different forms of documentation.

F. Ochildiev’s studies reveal the fiscal side of inter-khanate trade. According to him, after the growth of Russian influence, merchants were forced to pay duties in several jurisdictions: inside the khanates, outside them and at Russian customs offices. Nevertheless, trade among the khanates did not stop [5, pp. 85–90].

The absence of numerous formal trade treaties should not be interpreted as the absence of regulation. In Central Asia, commercial regulation often appeared through repeated practice: sending envoys, confirming peaceful relations, protecting merchants, permitting caravans to pass, collecting customs dues, resolving road disputes, exchanging gifts and acknowledging trade privileges.

**Table 1. Forms of Commercial Diplomatic Practice.**

<b>Form of practice</b>	<b>Function in trade regulation</b>
Embassy missions	Negotiating trade, security and political issues
Ruler correspondence	Fixing political and economic understandings
Merchant protection	Guaranteeing caravan safety and road access
Customs payments	Regulating duties and fiscal obligations
Caravan routes	Controlling roads, crossings and stopping points

Caravanserais	Providing space for merchants and goods
Gifts and peshkash	Combining symbolic diplomacy with economic exchange
Archival records	Recording duties, caravans and administrative decisions

This broader concept allows historians to reconstruct trade even when no formal treaty text survives. The focus shifts from a single document to a system of documentary traces.

The Bukhara–Khiva trade relationship is most clearly reflected in diplomatic and chronicle sources. Allaeva argues that Khiva’s relations with Bukhara, Kokand, the Kazakh khanates and Iran should be examined as separate directions, each with its own characteristics [1, p. 164]. This means that the Bukhara–Khiva line should not be dissolved into a general history of Khiva; it requires independent analysis.

Court chronicles are valuable but require criticism. Allaeva notes that such chronicles describe relations among the three khanates from the perspective of particular political interests; therefore, they must be compared with official documents [1, p. 242]. This is crucial because information on trade in chronicles must be checked against chancery documents and fiscal evidence.

Ogahi’s *Riyaz ud-dawla* is especially important. It contains information on embassy relations, frontier issues, migration, the arrival of refugee leaders and correspondence with external powers. The manuscript is preserved in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan under no. 5364/II [6]. These materials show that trade was connected not only with markets but also with frontiers, security, mobility and diplomatic writing.

Kholiqulov provides an important example concerning the security of Bukharan merchants. In one case, because of insecurity on the road, Bukharan merchants could not leave a caravanserai. The Khorezmian side provided them with guards, helped them cross the river and sent them safely back to Bukhara [3]. This was not a formal trade treaty, but it functioned as contractual practice: merchant security became an interstate obligation.

Another important issue is the economic life of borderlands. Kholiqulov notes that Bukharan pastoral groups from Karakul and Eljiklik used pastures near Uchochoq, which belonged to the Khiva Khanate, and in some cases identified themselves with the Khivan side [3]. This shows that frontier economic

practice was more flexible than formal political borders.

Allaeva also emphasizes the role of wealthy merchants in Khiva’s external trade. According to her, trade with neighboring countries operated not only through state channels but also through agreements among large merchants; the trade centers of Russia, Bukhara, Kokand and Iran, as well as the exchange of gifts such as peshkash and hadya, played an important role [1, p. 394].

The Bukhara–Khiva direction is best reconstructed through diplomatic documents, chronicles, evidence of merchant safety and practices of mediation. Contractual practice here appears less as numerical customs data and more as protection of caravans, diplomatic correspondence, gift exchange and frontier regulation.

The Bukhara–Kokand direction has a different source profile. Here trade is more visible through customs, market and fiscal data. Madrakhimov demonstrates that the Kokand Khanate had a developed system of markets, caravanserais, internal and external trade and customs payments [2, pp. 18–144].

Ochildiev notes that in the nineteenth century Bukhara traded actively with Kokand, and that the range and volume of goods imported from Kokand to Bukhara were broader than those of the Khivan direction [5, pp. 85–90]. This explains why the Bukhara–Kokand line is better represented in quantitative data.

The most important case is the Khujand customs office. According to Ochildiev, in the 1860s–1870s more than 7,000 camels carrying goods annually passed from Bukhara to Kokand through Khujand. After Khujand came under Russian control, 13,141 rubles in duties were collected from Bukharan and Kokand caravans in the first two and a half months. By 1866, customs revenues reached 22,950 rubles [7].

The reference to 13,141 rubles is especially significant because it is connected with an archival citation: National Archive of Uzbekistan, fund I-1, inventory 20, file 2640, folio 64 verso [7]. This proves that commercial relations can be studied not only through narrative sources but also through archival-fiscal documentation.

Ura-Tyube customs data also matter. According to A. Mukhtorov, in 1868 merchants passing through Ura-Tyube paid 7,030 rubles and 70 kopecks in duties [8, p. 86].

**Table 2. Customs Evidence in the Bukhara–Kokand Direction**

Evidence	Data	Analytical significance
Khujand customs route	More than 7,000 camels annually	Indicates the scale of caravan trade
Khujand after Russian control	13,141 rubles in 2.5 months	Archival-fiscal evidence of trade
Khujand, 1866	22,950 rubles	Growth of customs control
Ura-Tyube, 1868	7,030 rubles 70 kopecks	Importance of alternative routes

The Bukhara–Kokand trade is best reconstructed through customs and fiscal data. Unlike the Bukhara–Khiva direction, which is more visible in diplomacy and chronicles, the Kokand direction provides more precise quantitative evidence: caravans, duties, customs points and archival records.

Kholiqulov shows that relations among Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand developed not only bilaterally but also within a triangular balance. The deterioration of Bukhara–Kokand relations could encourage closer contacts between Kokand and Khiva. For example, Amir Nasrullah’s campaigns in Fergana and occupation of Kokand created conditions for Khivan activity against Bukhara [3].

This matters for trade history. If Bukhara was in conflict with Kokand, caravan routes, merchant safety and market access could change. If Kokand moved closer to Khiva, the regional trading system changed as well. In Riyaz ud-dawla, Khorezmian merchants could become objects of political pressure in connection with Bukhara–Russian relations [6]. This shows that merchants were not only economic actors; they could also become instruments of diplomacy.

A. Berdiev adds another important dimension. He notes that trade between Khiva and Kokand often passed through Bukhara. Khivan merchants purchased Kokand goods in Bukhara, while Kokand merchants bought Khivan goods there [9]. Therefore, Bukhara was not merely one participant in trade; it functioned as an intermediary market between neighboring khanates.

Direct routes between Kokand and Khiva existed through Ak-Mechet, Kushkurgan, Chimkurgan and Yangikurgan, but their length, inconvenience and insecurity limited their intensity [9]. Bukhara therefore remained a more stable market intermediary.

Scheme 1. Bukhara as a mediating market.

Khiva goods → Bukhara market → Kokand merchants  
 Kokand goods → Bukhara market → Khivan merchants

Bukhara market → redistribution center → regional trade network

Inter-khanate trade was not an isolated economic activity. It depended on triangular political balance and on Bukhara’s function as a mediating market. This makes Bukhara a central commercial-diplomatic node of the region.

Sh. Davurova emphasizes that Bukhara’s trade with Khiva, Kokand and the Kazakh hordes depended on arrangements concerning trade routes, caravanserais, transport and caravan protection [10]. This expands the concept of contractual practice: it included not only diplomatic letters and duties but also the infrastructure of trade.

Political conflicts, raids on caravans and insecurity on the roads could weaken trade and raise prices in markets. However, trade did not stop entirely; it continued in limited or altered forms [10]. This means that contractual practice was necessary precisely because trade developed under conditions of risk.

Roads, caravanserais, transport and protection services were not secondary details. They were central elements of commercial diplomacy, just as important as customs payments and embassy negotiations.

**Conclusion**

The analysis shows that Bukhara’s commercial relations with Khiva and Kokand cannot be studied only through the search for formal trade treaties. Although complete texts of such treaties are limited, trade left a broad documentary trace.

The Bukhara–Khiva direction is better represented in diplomatic and chronicle sources: Khivan chancery documents, chronicles, embassy materials, evidence of

merchant security, gifts, wealthy merchant mediation and frontier practices. The Bukhara–Kokand direction, by contrast, provides stronger fiscal and customs evidence: Khujand and Ura-Tyube customs offices, numbers of caravans, amounts of duties and archival references.

Kholiqulov's materials show that commercial diplomacy was linked to merchant security, frontier mobility, political pressure and triangular relations among Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand. Berdiev's research allows us to view Bukhara as a mediating market between Khiva and Kokand. Davurova's conclusions show that trade depended on infrastructural arrangements: roads, caravanserais, transport and protection.

The main conclusion is that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a "treaty" in Bukhara's trade relations with neighboring khanates should be understood not only as a written legal act, but as a broader system of contractual practice. This system included diplomacy, customs administration, merchant safety, caravan infrastructure, fiscal records and market mediation.

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