



LAND OWNERSHIP RELATIONS IN THE BUKHARA EMIRATE

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Abstract: *This article analyzes the historical development of land ownership relations in the Bukhara Emirate, the main types of land tenure, and their role in socio-economic life. It examines state-owned lands (mulki devoniy), lands owned by authorized individuals (private property or mulki xususiy), and lands allocated to religious institutions (waqf). The study highlights the social stratification, economic relations, and administrative system that developed on the basis of these land types. The article also reveals how the land tenure system affected relationships among peasants, nobility, and clergy, as well as the processes of social stratification through taxation and land leasing. The research results contribute to a deeper understanding of the agrarian structure of the Bukhara Emirate. Taxes, obligations, and leasing systems related to land ownership are also analyzed based on historical sources.*

Keywords: *Bukhara, emir, land, property, private, waqf, tax, tenancy, agrarian, social.*

The Bukhara Emirate was one of the key states in the history of Central Asia, with agriculture forming the core of its economy. In this field, especially, the land ownership system played a significant role. Land relations in the khanate not only defined economic processes but also had a profound impact on social structure and political stability. In this regard, the land tenure system served as one of the main factors in shaping the socio-economic structure and administrative mechanisms of the Bukhara Emirate. During the Ashtarkhanid period, the territory of the Bukhara Khanate significantly decreased. Sources from the early 18th century mention six provinces under the khanate's control: Bukhara, Samarkand, Sangzor, Uratapa, Shahrissabz, and Gazar. Although the provinces of Hisor, Turkestan, Fergana, and Balkh were temporarily reunited during the reign of Imamqulikhan, by the time of Abulfayzkhan, the Khiva and Kokand khanates had become independent states⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ Zamonov A., Egamberdiyev A. Buxoro amirligi, Xorazm va Qo'qon xonliklari. Darslik. Toshkent: «BAYOZ», 2022, – 148 b.





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In the Bukhara Khanate, political power was historically held by two main dynasties — the Shaybanids and the Ashtarkhanids. Both dynasties belonged to the lineage of Jochi Khan. The Ashtarkhanids, in particular, had governed the region of Ashtarkhan (present-day Astrakhan) and its surrounding territories since the late 14th century. After the Russian Empire conquered Astrakhan in 1556, a member of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty, Yormuhammad Khan, migrated to Bukhara with his family and relatives. This event laid the foundation for the Ashtarkhanid dynasty's active involvement in the political arena of Transoxiana (Movarounnahr)⁴⁸

Various written sources related to the countries of the Near and Far East contain information about the socio-economic life, political administration, and reformist activities of the rulers of the Bukhara Khanate during the 16th–17th centuries. In particular, official documents and records that emerged as a result of diplomatic relations established with countries such as Iran and India serve as important sources for studying the history of this period⁴⁹.

A noteworthy aspect is that despite political complexities and internal conflicts, the Ashtarkhanid dynasty paid special attention to science, culture, art, and architecture, supporting these fields at the level of state policy. This, in turn, contributed to the continuous development of the scholarly and cultural traditions established during the Shaybanid era. Thus, under Ashtarkhanid rule, Bukhara maintained its status as a scientific and cultural center in the Central Asian region. However, the political instability, internal wars, and dynastic struggles that continued during the Ashtarkhanid period negatively affected agriculture—the main sector of the country's economy. Some 18th-century historical sources report that peasants in the Zarafshan Valley and the Fergana region abandoned their lands and migrated elsewhere.

Although the rulers attempted to restore economic stability in order to collect taxes and levies regularly and on time, these efforts often failed to produce the desired results. By the early 17th century, many irrigated lands had come under the control of *joybor shaykhs* (religious elites). Despite the fact that Islamic law prohibited the sale and purchase of water, wealthy officials and members of the religious class—large landowners—had seized control over irrigation systems, particularly canals and water channels. This led to increased political and economic dominance over water resources and exacerbated social inequality in the agrarian sector. These lands were under the direct authority of the head of state—the emir—and the revenue generated from them was directed either to the state treasury or for the emir's personal use⁵⁰

Waqf lands – These were lands allocated for religious and charitable purposes, such as covering the expenses of mosques, madrasas, khanaqahs (Sufi lodges), and other religious institutions. Such lands could neither be sold nor inherited and were to be used

⁴⁸ Karimov A. O'rta asrlar Markaziy Osiyo tarixidan ma'lumotlar. – Toshkent: O'zbekiston, 2005,-452b

⁴⁹ Bobomurodov Sh. Buxoro amirligi ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy tuzumi. – Toshkent: Fan, 2001,-486b

⁵⁰ Vohidov Sh. O'rta asrlarda yer egaligi munosabatlari. – Toshkent: Sharq, 1998,-248b.





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strictly for their designated purposes. **Private property lands (mulk lands)** – These lands were owned by individuals who had the right to freely sell or bequeath them. They were mostly possessed by upper-class feudal lords and wealthy nobles. **Iqta lands** – These were lands granted in return for military service. The holder (muqtā‘) received income from the land but did not possess full ownership rights over it. This system primarily served as a means of providing material support to the military class. **Chiqir and tortul lands** – These lands were rented out to ordinary peasants, who worked them with their own labor and gave a portion of the harvest to the landowner. Such peasants usually represented the economically weaker segments of society⁵¹.

Land ownership is a legal form of holding land defined by rights such as ownership, possession, inheritance, and lease. These lands are involved in economic activity and become part of the market-based economic system. Land ownership not only grants rights to the landowner but also imposes certain obligations. In the history of Central Asia, various forms of land ownership existed—*amlak* (state land), *waqf* (land allocated for religious institutions), *mulk* (private land), and *tanho* (land granted in return for service). In the khanates of Bukhara, Kokand, and Khiva, many lands were under the control of the rulers, often inherited and leased out to be cultivated by peasants.

In the Bukhara Emirate, land was the primary means of production, and ownership of land was closely tied to political power and social status. Through the landholding system, social classes in the emirate were interlinked: upper classes owned land, while lower classes consisted mostly of laboring peasants who lived on a rental basis. These peasants often had to work on land they did not own. They were obliged to give a portion of their annual harvest to the landowners and, in some cases, perform unpaid labor (*begar*). Some peasants lived in a semi-dependent condition, effectively tied to the landowner, and could be described as “semi-free peasants.” The extent of land ownership was a key factor in determining a person’s status in society—those who owned more land enjoyed greater wealth, prestige, and power⁵².

Additionally, **Kafsan** was a fee collected by the landowner or landlord, separate from taxes, and taken from the threshing floor during harvest. **Muhrona** referred to a practice during the harvest season where grain piles at the threshing floor were registered and sealed. The seal was made of clay or wood, and no one was allowed to sell the grain until it was officially unsealed. If someone was caught stealing, a fine of up to 52 tangas could be imposed, or equivalent property was confiscated. **Suruvona** was a fine imposed during the Bukhara Emirate period on semi-nomadic herders. It was charged when livestock were driven onto state-owned agricultural fields or onto lands and pastures belonging to the ruler or officials.

⁵¹ Qosimov B. va boshqalar. O‘zbekiston tarixi. 2-kitob. – Toshkent: “O‘zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi” Davlat ilmiy nashriyoti, 2000,-167b.

⁵² Xo‘jayev M. Buxoro xonligi davrida mulkchilik munosabatlari. – Samarqand: Imkon, 2010,-468 b





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During the emir's field inspections or military campaigns, additional taxes and levies were imposed on the population. For example, in such emergency situations, a special tax called "**jol**" was introduced, which originated during the reign of Amir Shohmurod. Later, under Amir Muzaffar's rule, a new type of tax known as "**aminona**" was introduced. This tax was collected at a rate of 1.5% of the value of goods and property, and over time, it evolved into a permanent form of taxation⁵³

In addition to major taxes, special levies were also collected from those who transported goods by river for commercial purposes. This fee, known as "suv puli" (water tax), was paid when goods were transported across rivers, canals, ditches, or irrigation channels. This tax was collected uniformly from the population, regardless of their financial status.

Another levy, known as "ko'prik puli" (bridge tax), was imposed on individuals transporting goods across bridges that were either locally managed or state-owned.

For agricultural communities, additional taxes were imposed alongside land tax. These included a special tax called "tanob puli" for each *tanob* (a unit of land) of orchard or vegetable plot, and "alaf puli" for the use of clover fields. These two types of taxes were often collectively referred to as *tanobona* or *tanob puli*. The amount of these taxes varied depending on factors such as proximity to markets and other regional characteristics.

In the late 1850s, during the reign of Amir Nasrullo, certain modifications were made to these taxes. Alaf puli – a tax mainly imposed on clover fields, fruit orchards, and vineyards. Tanob puli – a payment collected based on the harvest from orchards and clover fields; also referred to as the orchard or clover tax. Barg puli – a tax collected from mulberry groves cultivated in oases and valleys. In the Bukhara Emirate, peasants who owned such groves pruned them each spring and raised silkworms, paying this tax annually. However, no tax was levied on mulberry trees grown in private household gardens.

During the Bukhara Emirate era, owners of water mills and *objuvoz* (water-lifting devices) were also subject to certain taxes, either in monetary or in-kind form. The collection, accounting, and administration of taxes were overseen by the *devonbegi* — the official responsible for financial affairs. He maintained the *olpon daftar*, or tax registers⁵⁴.

The fee known as "Jo'ycha puli" was paid by peasants for the use of small irrigation structures such as canals and ditches. "Objuvoz puli" was levied for irrigating crops like rice, oats, and millet using a water-lifting device (*objuvoz*), with the amount of this tax varying by region. "Tegirmon puli" or "Osiyo puli" was a tax paid for the use of water mills, ranging from 20 to 100 tangas annually. Additionally, there was a tax called "Chig'ir puli", imposed on lands irrigated using water wheels (*chig'ir*) in areas

⁵³ Mahkamova M. Vaqf yerlarining ijtimoiy ro'li. – "Tarix va haqiqat" jurnali, 2015, -255 b.

⁵⁴ Mahkamova M. Vaqf yerlarining ijtimoiy ro'li. – "Tarix va haqiqat" jurnali, 2015, -255b.





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practicing irrigation-based farming. If a peasant irrigated even one *tanob* of land with a *chig'ir*, they were obliged to pay this tax—even if they were in debt.

"Cho'p puli", sometimes referred to in sources as "firewood tax" or "grass tax", was introduced in connection with the population's use of natural resources such as forests, thickets, saxaul groves, and other vegetation for harvesting plants and cutting trees. The Bukhara Emirate maintained trade relations primarily with India, Afghanistan, Iran, and China. Many foreign merchants regularly visited the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara.

It should also be noted that in the first half of the 18th century, the city of Orenburg played a vital role in expanding trade relations between Russia and Central Asia. The opening of the new Orenburg trade route turned the city into a key hub for commercial exchange between the two regions. This development directly paved the way for the formation of Russia-India trade relations. A Bukhara merchant named Irnazar Maksutov, who served in a diplomatic capacity in Russia, successfully delivered various goods to Orenburg and attracted merchants from Bukhara and India to the area.

Overall, during this period, trade ties between Russia and the Bukhara Khanate were strengthened, contributing to increased economic and political closeness. While Bukhara's relations with India were primarily neighborly, its interactions with Iran were more complex due to the Khanate's military campaigns aimed at conquering Iranian territories. Despite this, numerous traders and envoys from Iran, India, and Afghanistan came to Bukhara for commerce and participated in various fairs. Special quarters in Bukhara were even designated for Indian merchants. Traders from Bukhara and Balkh often traveled to India to bring back goods. According to French traveler François Bernier, dried fruits from Iran, Balkh, Bukhara, and Samarkand were sold in the markets of Delhi. In modern terms, this period witnessed a wide-scale practice of export and import activities⁵⁵.

In the economic life of Movarounnahr, major centers such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Tashkent held a special position. The city of Tashkent and its surrounding areas served as an important hub for trade, where caravanserais were built for merchants arriving from various countries. Notably, caravanserais also appeared near the mountain routes along the Chirchik River. Tashkent's location in an oasis adjacent to the steppe zone provided a stimulus for the development of the city's economy. Nevertheless, historical sources also report attacks by nomadic tribes. The city's surrounding defensive walls played a significant role in ensuring the safety of its inhabitants.

Bukhara, on the other hand, had already attained the status of a capital during the Shaybanid era and continued to serve as the political, military, and administrative center of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty. Although craftsmanship was mainly concentrated around urban areas during this period, economic decline and the strengthening of the subsistence economy led to the expansion of artisan activity in many large villages as well. The needs of the population were mostly met through locally produced goods

⁵⁵ Karimov A. O'rta asrlar Markaziy Osiyo tarixidan ma'lumotlar. – Toshkent: O'zbekiston, 2005. -452b





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made by skilled craftsmen. In particular, textile production and related industries saw further advancement during this time⁵⁶.

It is also worth noting that even during the turbulent period marked by political instability and internal wars, peasants attempted to continue their agricultural activities. The Zarafshan Valley served as the main agricultural region of the Bukhara Khanate. Late medieval authors also reported the presence of cultivated fields and orchards in other regions. For example, Fergana was noted for its "beautiful orchards and fields," Qarshi for its "irrigated lands," and the Tashkent oasis for its "mountainous grain-growing areas." Termez was famous for its "delicious melons and grains," while Shahrisabz was known for its "fertile lands."

During the Ashtarkhanid era, wheat, barley, millet, beans, mung beans, rice, cotton, vegetables, and melons were cultivated in irrigated lands, while wheat, barley, melons, and watermelons were grown in rain-fed (non-irrigated) areas. Although warfare had a negative impact on agriculture, in times of peace, the land yielded high harvests⁵⁷.

The amir granted state-owned lands and villages inhabited by the population as *suyurgol* (tax-exempt land grants) to princes, major religious figures, sayyids, and scholars, and as *tanho* (conditional land grants) to military leaders and court officials. No taxes were collected from the holders of *suyurgol* lands for the state treasury. The *tanho* lands, however, were not considered the personal property of the recipients; rather, they were granted the right to collect taxes from the peasants working the land. Additionally, the khan bestowed lands and estates upon individuals who rendered exceptional service, which were exempt from taxes and referred to as *mulki hurri holis* (purely free property).

Private landowners typically leased these lands to landless peasants and gained significant profit from them. Lands given to religious institutions were classified as *waqf* and were also tax-exempt. The right to sell, donate, or convert land into *waqf* was vested exclusively in the ruler. Conditional landownership was known by various terms such as *suyurgol*, *iqta*, *tanho*, or *tiul*. By the 17th–18th centuries, the concept of *suyurgol* had evolved—during this period, such lands were increasingly granted to clerics, sayyids, khojas, sheikhs, scholars, and poets. According to Mahmud ibn Vali, when a ruler granted land, those allocated to religious figures and sayyids were called *suyurgol*, while those granted to military personnel were referred to as *tanho*.

It is worth mentioning that during the Shaybanid period, important religious changes also took place in the Bukhara Emirate. Islam had taken deep root in Central Asia, particularly in Bukhara, and during this time, Islamic teachings, its history, and legal-religious systems had a profound influence on the life of the Bukhara Khanate. Under the Shaybanids, centers of science and religious thought emerged in Bukhara and its surrounding territories. The prominent scholars, theologians, and intellectuals of the

⁵⁶ Karimov A. O'rta asrlar Markaziy Osiyo tarixidan ma'lumotlar. – Toshkent: O'zbekiston, 2005, -452b

⁵⁷ Mahkamova M. Vaqf yerlarining ijtimoiy ro'li. – "Tarix va haqiqat" jurnali, 2015, -255b.





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time introduced innovations in religious studies through their writings. Numerous mosques and madrasas were built in Bukhara during this period, some of which are still studied today. Among them, the Bukhara Madrasa, built by the Shaybanids, holds particular significance. During this time, religious education reached a very high level, and Bukhara continued to serve as a center of religious knowledge in Central Asia.

The fiscal system and tax policies of the Shaybanid period were complex and multifaceted. More than 40 types of duties, levies, taxes, fines, and mandatory payments existed. The general population paid separate charges for the use of land and water. In addition, they were also required to make specific payments for the benefit of state officials. Special taxes were introduced to fund the construction or repair of essential infrastructure such as city fortifications, mosques, madrasas, and irrigation structures. Citizens were also obligated to contribute funds for the construction of roads and bridges.

Conclusion: The landownership system in the Bukhara Emirate reflected the socio-economic structure of the society and formed a core component of the administrative framework. Ownership and use of land were regulated based on Sharia law, and both landowners and users were subject to its provisions. Changes to the system could only be made through reforms by the amir. Taxes and levies were collected by officials appointed by the amir. These land relations now serve as valuable sources for historical and academic research. To regulate the financial and tax systems during this period, a special financial office known as the devonkhona operated in the Bukhara Emirate. In this office, financial transactions, taxes, rental payments, and revenues from trade were meticulously recorded in special registers. These ledgers documented not only the type and amount of taxes but also information about the individuals or groups who paid them.

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