



KHIVA KHANATE AND ITS RELATIONS WITH BRITAIN IN ARCHIVAL ANALYSIS

Jahongir Razzakov

Phd Student, Namangan state university

Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 24 th October 2025 Accepted: 20 th November 2025	This article explores the nature, depth, and dynamics of the relations between the Khiva Khanate and Great Britain during the nineteenth century, based primarily on materials preserved in the Khiva Khanate archives and related comparative sources. By analyzing diplomatic correspondence, gift exchanges, trade records, and travel accounts, the study highlights how humanitarian considerations, political pragmatism, and regional security concerns shaped Khiva–British interactions.
Keywords:	

INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century was a turning point for Central Asia, marked by the expansion of the Russian Empire and the strategic competition between imperial powers commonly referred to as the “Great Game.” Within this context, the Khiva Khanate found itself in a vulnerable geopolitical position. Although geographically distant from Britain, Khiva developed indirect yet meaningful relations with the British Empire, particularly through Afghanistan and British India. Previous scholarship has often focused on Anglo-Russian rivalry as a macro-level process, leaving the internal perspectives of Central Asian polities underexplored. This article aims to address that gap by examining archival materials from the Khiva Khanate that shed light on contacts with Britain. The central research question is: how did the Khivan Khanate perceive, construct, and manage its relations with Britain in a period of increasing external pressure?

METHODS

The study is based on qualitative historical analysis of primary archival sources preserved in the Khiva Khanate collections, particularly compilation files (yig'ma jildlar) and registers documenting diplomatic correspondence, gift exchanges, and financial records. These materials are compared with British travel accounts, diplomatic reports, and translated memoirs, especially those connected with Afghanistan as an intermediary region. A comparative and contextual method is applied to identify convergences and divergences between local archival narratives and British sources. Special attention is given to the chronology, material culture (such as gifts and currency), and the human agency reflected in the documents. This approach allows for a more nuanced and humane interpretation of Khiva–British relations beyond formal diplomacy.

RESULTS

Archival evidence demonstrates that relations between the Khiva Khanate and Britain were multifaceted and largely indirect, mediated through Afghanistan and British India. One of the earliest documented contacts dates to 1846, when the British consul in India sent a collection of valuable gifts to the Khiva khan, including silver-plated teapots, perfumes, gold watches, chains, tea, and fine textiles. These gifts were not merely ceremonial but signified mutual recognition and respect. Further materials reveal that Afghan rulers played a crucial intermediary role. Friendly correspondence from Afghan Amir Abdur Rahman Khan to the Khiva khan, preserved in archival collections, illustrates a diplomatic triangle linking Khiva, Afghanistan, and Britain. The English translation of Abdur Rahman Khan’s diary, published in London in 1900, helps date and contextualize these letters and confirms British involvement in the transmission of regional political knowledge.

One of the most significant episodes occurred in 1872, when Khiva Khan Muhammad Rahim Khan II dispatched an envoy, Muhammad Aminbay, to British India in an attempt to secure support against the impending Russian advance. The archival records detail the scale and seriousness of this mission: an 18-member caravan, accompanied by slaves, livestock, horses, camels, and substantial financial resources. The route—via Merv, Herat, Kandahar, Kabul, and Peshawar—underscores the logistical and diplomatic challenges faced by the khanate.

Material culture provides further evidence of interaction. British firearms, textiles, and gold coins circulated within Khiva. English cloth became fashionable among the elite, frequently appearing in gift registers for officials. Notably, British gold sovereigns were known and valued in Khiva. Abdur Rahman Khan’s diary recounts that the Khiva khan once offered him 200,000 gold sovereigns during his period of exile, an offer reflecting both



generosity and the financial integration of British currency into the region.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that Khiva–British relations were shaped less by formal treaties and more by pragmatic, human-centered diplomacy. Gift exchange functioned as a language of trust, respect, and political signaling. Envoys such as Muhammad Aminbay were not only representatives of state interests but also individuals undertaking perilous journeys with the hope of safeguarding their homeland.

Khiva's outreach to Britain should be understood as a strategy of survival rather than alignment. Faced with Russian expansion and limited military capacity, the khanate sought moral, political, and possibly military support from a distant power perceived as a counterbalance. At the same time, British engagement remained cautious, filtered through Afghan intermediaries and constrained by broader imperial calculations.

Importantly, the archival materials humanize historical actors. The emphasis on hospitality, honor, and the ethics of gift-giving reflects a political culture in which personal dignity and moral obligation mattered deeply. This challenges purely imperial or deterministic readings of Central Asian history.

CONCLUSION

Archival sources from the Khiva Khanate reveal that relations with Britain in the nineteenth century were real, meaningful, and grounded in human interaction, even if they remained indirect and limited in strategic outcome. Through diplomacy, trade, and symbolic exchange, Khiva attempted to assert its agency in a rapidly changing world.

By integrating local archival voices with external sources, this study demonstrates that Khiva was not a passive object of imperial rivalry but an active participant seeking humane and pragmatic solutions to existential threats. Future research could expand this approach by incorporating additional Afghan and British archival materials to further illuminate this interconnected historical space.

REFERENCES

1. Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Khiva Khanate collections, Fonds I-125, various compilation files (yig'ma jildlar).
2. Abdur Rahman Khan. *The Autobiography of Abdur Rahman, Amir of Afghanistan*. London, 1900.

3. Gulboev, N., & Ahmedova, D. Studies on the internal political conditions and foreign relations of the Khiva Khanate based on archival documents.
4. Ogahiy. Historical works on the Khiva Khanate and diplomatic encounters.
5. British travel accounts and diplomatic reports related to Central Asia and Khiva (19th century).