



Spiritual Heritage: Cultural Life and Libraries in the Kokand Khanate

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Abstract

In the Kokand Khanate, the development of librarianship and the art of manuscript production flourished under the consistent attention of its rulers. The presence of a designated librarian in the Kokand palace indicates that the rulers maintained exclusive libraries within their palaces. Some Kokand khans showed a profound interest in handwritten books and libraries in general, and information is provided about their patronage of poets and writers.

Keywords: Reader, art of manuscript production, palace, mosque, madrasa, manuscript, document, librarian, library, calligrapher

In the Eastern world, reading culture, the art of manuscript production, and library activities have traditionally held a special place. Libraries operated not only in the palaces of rulers but also in the homes of major landowners and intellectuals, as well as in mosques and madrasas. The Kokand Khanate, established in the 18th century, also had a dedicated library within its palace. Later rulers, including Umar Khan, Murad Khan, and Khudoyar Khan, maintained a large library in their palace, which housed valuable Eastern manuscripts on topics such as history, geography, medicine, linguistics, grammar, jurisprudence, theology, and other sciences.

In the Kokand Khanate, librarianship and the art of manuscript production developed under the continuous attention and support of the rulers. The position of a librarian within the Kokand palace reflects the rulers' desire to maintain exclusive libraries in their own palaces. These collections included not only works by local authors but also pieces by poets and writers from India, Afghanistan, Iran, and other Eastern nations. Some of the Kokand rulers had a keen interest in handwritten books and libraries in general and acted as patrons to poets and writers. For example, Muhammad Umar Khan highly valued poetry and literature, composing poetry under the pseudonym "Amiriy."

During his reign (1809–1822), a circle of talented poets emerged in Fergana, which included his wife, Nodirabegim. Around 1822, a collection of works by 18 poets was compiled by Yusuf Tunqator and calligrapher Yusuf Muhammad. This anthology, representing the works of poets from Kokand, was later printed in lithographic form in limited copies.

During the reign of the last ruler, Khudoyar Khan, many manuscripts were acquired for the palace library from private individuals. In particular, numerous Eastern historical manuscripts were purchased from Mullah Muhammad Rahim of





Shakhrisabz. Rahim himself was an avid collector of old manuscripts, traveling over twenty-seven years through India, Mongolia, and other countries in search of valuable manuscripts.

According to Yahyakhon Domla Dadaboyev, a senior researcher at the State Museum of Kokand Cultural History, the library was located in the courtyard of the madrasa in the outer part of the Orda (palace complex). However, due to the subsequent demolition of the outer and middle courtyards of Khudoyar Khan's Orda, this palace library has not survived to the present day.

During this period, information from Russian researchers served as the primary source regarding the number and description of books in the Kokand palace library. Following the occupation of the Kokand Khanate by Tsarist forces, all of the khanate's wealth, including the archive documents and 130 manuscript books from the palace, were taken to St. Petersburg and handed over to the Imperial Public Library. Among these were rare works, such as *Tavorikhi Muqimkhoniy*, *Jahonnoma*, *Rashahot*, *Rashonakh ul-Funun*, and many other unique texts. A similar collection of rare Eastern manuscripts was also kept at the palace of Nasriddinkhan, the Beg of Andijan.

In 1897, during a research expedition to the Fergana Valley, the orientalist K.G. Zaleman noted that the remaining part of the khanate's library was stored at the Kokand district administration. Additionally, in the summer of 1875, when Khudoyar Khan left the capital for Tashkent due to instability in the country, he took with him part of the treasury and a portion of the rare works from the library. Subsequently, during the reign of Nasriddinbek and the pretender Polat Khan, the palace was looted several times.

The palace officials and servants primarily used the books in the palace libraries. For instance, the historian Mirza Aziz frequently consulted the manuscripts and compiled a large volume titled *The History of the Kokand Khanate*, which included information on the histories of Central Asian states and the Mongol Empire. These works also covered the histories of Fergana and Margilan. Additionally, biographies and personal histories of individuals collected by the Russian district head in Margilan were also included.

While the exact quantity of the Kokand palace library's collection remains unknown, it was considered magnificent for its time and rich in valuable sources.

In that era, there were also many unique collections of books in the administrative centers of the khanate, alongside madrasas and mosques, and among the educated segments of the population. A unique copy of *Zafarnama*, bearing the seal of the khanate's library, was donated in 1940 to the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan by a relative of Muhiddinkhoja Qazi and is still preserved there. Before Khudoyar Khan departed from Tashkent to Turkestan, he





entrusted his relative Mir Arif with collections of works by Mirzo Abdulqadir Bedil and Alisher Navoi.

Some researchers consider Mullah Sarimsokhoja, who worked as the custodian of the library under the city district administration after the Russian invasion, to be the last director (librarian) of the palace library. However, according to the orientalist K.G. Zaleman, Mullah Sarimsokhoja served only temporarily as the custodian while the khanate's library was stored at the Kokand district administration.

Some information on the manuscripts in the Kokand palace library comes from testimonies of those who participated in the 1875 expedition to Kokand. Documents indicate that A.L. Kun was assigned to collect manuscripts and other cultural artifacts, with a specific directive to gather books, manuscripts, and documents written in local languages. A total of 103 manuscripts were taken from the Kokand palace library, mostly consisting of religious texts in Arabic (such as copies of the Quran, books dedicated to the lives and deeds of prophets and saints, Muslim narratives, collections, and similar works).

Among these books were also manuscripts on philosophy, logic, grammar, oratory, and medicine (such as *Bahr al-Jawahir* and *The Sea of Pearls* by Atabib Khorzani), over 15 works in Persian, as well as works on Islamic law, historical works like *Tuhfat ul-Khani* (a history of Muhammad Rahim Khan's rule), *Tarikh-i Jahangiri* by Jigan Lodi, and other books covering the history of Fergana and Kokand from the era of Shahrukh to Khudoyar Khan.

Some of the manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic-Chagatai dialect from the Kokand palace library were transferred to the Imperial Public Library in St. Petersburg. Additionally, Muhammad Aziz Margilani in his *Tarikh-i Azizi* (History of Aziz) mentions Sarimsokhoja as one of the teachers in Kokand.

Based on some archival documents, Rashid Nabiev reports that Mirzaolim Mushrif, author of *Ansob us-Salotin*, served as the palace librarian during Khudoyar Khan's reign. Aziz Qayumov notes that after the khanate was taken over by Russia, the Russian authorities demanded that Mirzaolim provide 50 manuscript books.

However, he was unable to provide them. When the pressure on him became excessive, he handed over 10 manuscripts to appease the authorities. In our opinion, the Russian government's demand for 50 manuscripts from Mirzaolim Mushrif, along with the threat to his life that ultimately compelled him to provide 10 manuscripts, supports Rashid Nabiev's assertion that he was the last palace librarian of the Kokand Khanate.

The library contained a large number of poetic manuscripts, including collections by Navoi, Bedil, and other renowned Central Asian authors, as well as various works in Arabic and Persian. All of these manuscript collections were later





gifted to the Imperial Public Library in St. Petersburg by Governor-General K. L. Kaufman and were described by P. L. Lerch. A library with Eastern manuscripts also existed in the palace of Nasriddin, the Beg of Andijan (son of Khudoyar Khan).

In 1875, A. L. Kun, a participant in the Kokand campaign, traveled to Andijan to collect more books, manuscripts, and documents. This was because the beks (local rulers) of Namangan, Margilan, and other territories also had libraries containing Eastern manuscripts and books.

By the early 20th century, the palace library of the Kokand khans had fallen into decline, with manuscripts and books being stolen and sold in markets. In 1902, when V. V. Bartold visited Kokand to identify and study the manuscripts, he wrote regretfully, "At present, there is no collection of manuscripts left; even the small remnants of Khudoyar Khan's library have disappeared. In 1897, K. G. Zaleman saw these items at the home of Sarimsokhoja, the former custodian of the library."

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