



# Sericulture – The Main Occupation of The Ferghana Valley Population

**Madraximov Zoxid Sharofovich**

History, Namangan State University, Uzbekistan

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\*Correspondence: Madraximov Zoxid Sharofovich

Email: [z\\_madraximov@mail.ru](mailto:z_madraximov@mail.ru)

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**Abstract:** The article discusses sericulture, which was the main occupation of the population of the Ferghana Valley in the 18th and early 19th centuries. It highlights the silk and silk products produced in the major economic centers — Kokand, Namangan, Andijan, Margilan, and Osh — along with their significance in the internal and external trade of the country.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, The Khanate Of Kokand, Handicrafts, Silk, Cocoon, Chilla, Skein, Silk And Semi-Silk Fabrics, Kokand, Tashkent, Namangan, Margilan, O'sh, Merchant.

## Introduction

In the 18th and early 19th centuries, sericulture was one of the main activities of the population in the Ferghana Valley, and silk and silk fabrics were among the primary export goods of the country. By the late 1860s, there were nearly 900 households engaged in sericulture in Kokand and Margilan alone, each household operating 1 to 3 looms. Two to three family members were typically involved in the craft, producing two to five poods (about 32 to 80 kg) of silk per week. According to estimates, the annual production of silk in Kokand and Margilan amounted to 5560 poods (about 89 tons).

The silk produced in the Ferghana Valley was of high quality, making the region's markets well-known for raw silk and silk fabrics. Silk produced by artisans in the Ferghana Valley was categorized into varieties such as "Chilla," "Tafil," "Sarnoq," and others based on quality. Additionally, silk threads were spun and wound into skeins, with the highest quality skeins being those from Namangan.

## Methodology

Various fabrics were woven from silk. Artisans in Kokand, Margilan, Namangan, and Khujand produced silk fabrics (kanoviz, shoyi, atlas, etc.) and semi-silk fabrics (beqasam, banoras, adras). In Margilan, one of the major markets in the Ferghana Valley, the trade in silk and silk fabrics was lively throughout the year. F. Yefremov, a Russian orientalist who

visited the Ferghana Valley in the 1770s, noted in his memoirs about silk fabric production that there was a large round stone pillar in the center of the Margilan market, standing 40 sazhen (about 85 meters) high and 2.5 sazhen (about 5.3 meters) wide, where various fabrics were woven. F. Nazarov, a Russian diplomat who visited Margilan in 1813-1814, wrote that "there are various factories in the city where Persian fabrics, velvets, and various Asian textiles are produced and sold to Bukhara and Kashgar". In the mid-19th century, the Russian historian and orientalist V.V. Velyaminov-Zernov noted that silk fabrics and white and green chapan (coat) fabrics produced in Margilan and Khujand were famous in the markets of the Kokand Khanate.

Atlas, a type of silk fabric, was renowned among the silk and semi-silk fabrics produced by artisans in the Ferghana Valley. In Margilan, this fabric was known as "atlas" or "jiba arqoq". In 1876, there were 276 shoyi (silk) weaving workshops, 428 silk fabric weaving workshops, 232 spinning machines, and many workshops capable of producing 3000 arshins (about 2100 meters) of atlas annually in Kokand. Atlas, known as "Duriya," was also produced in Khujand and was comparable in quality to the atlas fabrics made in Margilan and Kokand, becoming popular beyond the markets of the Kokand Khanate.

Silk and silk products from the Ferghana Valley played a significant role in the external trade of the Kokand Khanate with the Bukhara and Khiva Khanates, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, the Kazakh steppes, Russia, and other regions. Among the products taken to the Bukhara markets from the Kokand Khanate were raw silk, silk fabrics, semi-silk fabrics, and skein silk, all of which were produced in the Ferghana Valley. F. Nazarov, who was in the Kokand Khanate in the early 19th century, noted that "various fabrics from silk and cotton are produced in the Kokand Khanate and exchanged for Russian goods brought by Bukhara traders". He also mentioned in his memoirs that various factories in Margilan, the center of sericulture in the Khanate, produced Persian fabrics, velvet, and various textiles, which were in high demand in the markets of Bukhara and Kashgar.

Silk fabrics from Margilan, shoyi (silk) from Namangan, pariposha (a type of silk fabric), and beqasam were transported from the cities of the Kokand Khanate to as far as Samarkand and Bukhara. In the 1860s, approximately 1000 camels transported silk from the Kokand Khanate to Bukhara each year, with the total amount of silk reaching around 12,000 poods (about 192 tons). The highest quality silk, known as "Chilla," was priced at 52 gold coins (197 rubles 60 kopecks) per pood in the Kokand markets in August 1871, and at 1110 tangas (222 rubles) in the Bukhara markets. The silk from the valley and the fabrics made from it were so famous that even one of the stalls in the Bukhara market was called "Shoyi Akhsi Gozari" after the silk from Akhsi, Ferghana Valley.

Silk skeins from the Ferghana Valley were also in high demand in the Bukhara markets. In August 1871, a first-class Namangan skein was sold at 32 gold coins (121 rubles 60 kopecks) per pood in the Kokand market and at 30 Bukhara gold coins (138 rubles) in the Bukhara market. Similarly, skeins processed in Kokand were popular in the Bukhara markets, with the first-class skein being sold for 27 gold coins (102 rubles 60 kopecks) per top in the Kokand market and for 25 Bukhara gold coins (115 rubles) in the Bukhara market.

In the mid-19th century, the cocoon market in Samarkand, one of the major cities of the Bukhara Emirate, had a high demand for cocoons grown in the Ferghana Valley among artisans from Bukhara and Samarkand. The Samarkand cocoon market operated twice a

week—on Wednesdays and Sundays—selling cocoons worth 700 gold coins per day and 5000 gold coins per month.

In the Khiva Khanate, there was also a high demand for silk and silk fabrics produced in the Ferghana Valley. Khivan merchants bought silk fabrics in large quantities from the Bukhara markets. In particular, the silk fabric known as "shoyi" from the Ferghana Valley was highly valued in the Khiva markets and was bought in large quantities by Khivan merchants.

The silk and silk fabrics produced in the Ferghana Valley were also highly valued in neighboring India. According to A. Burns, an English officer who traveled to Central Asia through Afghanistan in the 1830s, high-quality Kokand silk was transported to India via Kabul.

According to reports, in the mid-19th century, 800 bales of silk and 6000 poods of silk products—kanaviz, scarves, and tablecloths—were brought from the Central Asian Khanates to India via Bukhara annually. Most of these silk and silk products were from the Ferghana Valley.

According to archival data, in the mid-1860s, goods worth 200,000 rubles were exported annually from the Kokand Khanate to the Bukhara Khanate, Afghanistan, and India, including 8000 poods of silk.

## Result and Discussion

The "Chilla" variety of silk produced in the Kokand Khanate was famous in Eastern countries, especially in India. In 1867, 1000 camels transported silk from the Kokand and Bukhara Khanates to India, with a total weight of around 12,000 poods. Most of the silk was processed into finished products in Multan, with some being sent to Bombay. Silk trade was successful in Bombay, with Kokand silk also being transported to European countries through this port city.

Silk skeins, especially Namangan skeins, were transported from the Kokand Khanate to India via Bukhara and Kabul. In the 1870s, one pood of Namangan skeins was sold for 129 rubles in cash or 133 rubles on six months' credit.

The main export product of the Kokand Khanate to Afghanistan was silk. A portion of the silk brought to Afghan cities was purchased by local artisans, while the majority was taken to neighboring countries. According to European travelers in India, in the 1850s, high-quality "Kokand silk" was brought from Herat to Shikarpur, and in Kabul, the best-quality silk was known as "Kokand silk." The Kokand silk brought to Kabul was sorted and divided into different grades and then sent to Punjab and India.

Silk and silk fabrics from the Khanate were also popular in Afghanistan itself. In particular, artisans in the city of Khulm (Tashkurgan), where tailoring was developed, used Kokand's silk fabrics in their products. Kokand merchants bringing silk fabrics to Khulm were frequently encountered.

Raw silk, silk fabrics, and semi-silk fabrics were mainly taken from the Kokand Khanate to Iran. In 1870, 23 thousand poods of silk, valued at 2 million 120 thousand rubles, were sent from Bukhara to Iran, and part of this silk was brought from the Kokand Khanate.

Silk and semi-silk fabrics, products made by local artisans, and Chinese goods were taken from the Kokand Khanate to Arab countries and cities in the Ottoman Empire. Pilgrims traveling to Mecca and Medina during the annual Hajj season also played an important role in trade relations between the two regions. In particular, according to A. Vambery, who was in Central Asia in the 1860s, "50-60 Kokand pilgrims brought with them almost 40 dozen silk scarves, about 2,000 knives, 30 pieces of Namangan silk, many Kokand skullcaps, and other goods to sell in Arabia".

Some of the pilgrims from the valley traveling to Mecca preferred to use the route through Russia, via Orenburg – Astrakhan – Istanbul. During their pilgrimage journey, they took local goods with them and exchanged them for foreign products along the way. According to the Tashkent customs data, in June 1871, 400 silk scarves from Kokand were sent to Mecca and Medina through Tashkent, and between May and August 1872, goods worth 23,545 rubles 50 kopecks were sent to Mecca.

The famous Margilan silk fabrics, scarves, quilts, and other products of the Kokand Khanate found their buyers in Turkish markets and were frequently taken there by the khanate's merchants.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be noted that one of the main occupations of the Fergana Valley population from the 18th to the 1870s was sericulture, and silk and silk fabrics were among the main products in both domestic and foreign trade.

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