The OSCAR PUBLISHING Services
International Journal Of History And Political Sciences

VOLUME Vol.05 Issue11 2025
PAGE NO. 85-89
DOI 10.37547/ijhps/Volume05Issue11-18

Paper Production In The Kokand Khanate: Historical Stages Of Development And Social Significance

Begmatov Khurshid Isanaliyevich
Assistant, Faculty of Humanities and Languages, Department of History, Kokand State University, Kokand, Uzbekistan

Received: 12 October 2025; **Accepted:** 08 November 2025; **Published:** 30 November 2025

Abstract: This study investigates the historical development and socio-cultural significance of paper production within the Kokand Khanate, focusing on the operation of paper-making workshops in Kokand and its surrounding regions. The research outlines the key stages in the evolution of local paper craftsmanship and examines the economic role of paper as a valuable commodity in both internal markets and international trade networks of the khanate. Drawing on historical sources and scholarly interpretations, the article analyses traditional technologies used in producing Kokand paper, identifies characteristic features of its main varieties, and compares them with the well-established paper-making techniques of China and the renowned Samarqand paper tradition. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of Central Asian craft heritage and highlight the importance of Kokand's paper industry in the cultural and economic landscape of the region.

Keywords: Samarqand paper; Kokand paper-making; Mo'yi Muborak; Chorku; Tul; Abri (marbled) paper; Sahhof (bookbinder); Musavvir (ornamental painter); Jadvalkash (artisan responsible for decorative line-framing of texts); Lawvah (artisan preparing and transferring the main text into the margins); Qog'ozrez (paper cutter and preparer); Abroz (artisan producing abri paper); Farhangi Mardum.

Introduction: In Central Asia, Kokand emerged as the largest centre of paper production after Samarqand, and the rise of this industry in the region developed under specific historical conditions. It is well known that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, political crises and instability across the Central Asian polities led to a decline in cultural life, including the long-standing tradition of paper-making. Continuous warfare, uprisings, and conflicts between rival khanates contributed to the deterioration of the Samarqand school of paper production. Conversely, Kokand—where political conditions were becoming increasingly stable—began to witness a revival and expansion of paper-making. Craftsmen from Samarqand migrated to Kokand, and while production in Samarqand gradually ceased, Kokand's workshops increasingly dominated the paper supply across Turkestan, from the Aral Sea to the borders of China.

Evidence from the catalogue of Oriental manuscripts held at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan demonstrates that manuscript materials from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rarely appear on Samarqand paper. Instead, the majority of manuscripts and archival records dating from the second half of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century were written on Kokand paper. By the nineteenth century, Kokand's workshops had developed into the major paper-production centre of Central Asia. Paper-making was consolidated within designated neighbourhoods, with officials appointed to oversee product quality, quantity, and pricing. As a result, Kokand paper gradually displaced the long-established Samarqand and Khorasan papers from the regional market. Relying on local historical sources, the Kokand scholar Ahmadjon Madaminov also affirms that paper was already being produced in Kokand at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, historical information about Kokand's paper-making industry remains limited and fragmentary in written sources.

METHODS

The earliest written references to paper production in Kokand can be found in the travel diaries of officials, military personnel, and travellers of the Russian

Imperial administration who visited Turkestan in the second half of the nineteenth century. For instance, the Siberian Cossack Maksimov, having stayed in Tashkent, reported to his superiors: “Writing paper is produced in the cities of Tashkent and Kokand. In the paper-making establishment of Said Ahmad Bai, twenty workers are employed.” (Note: Maksimov and other authors translated the local term dukon as “factory” or “plant”.) [1].

In the 1870s, A. P. Fedchenko, who visited the Kokand Khanate, wrote: “The paper-making workshops of the Kokand Khanate are the only factories of their kind operating in Central Asia. Such workshops function in two villages of the khanate—one in Chorku and the other in Mo‘i Muborak (locally pronounced Mo‘ymuborak). The method of paper preparation employed in these workshops is astonishing.” [2]. Fedchenko emphasised the remarkable similarities between Kokand paper-making techniques and those of China.

Researcher N. Habibullaev interprets these observations by noting: “It is unsurprising that Central Asian paper-makers preserved the ancient Chinese techniques, traditions, and skills acquired long ago. Despite the antiquated nature of their tools, workshops, and labour-intensive hand production, they elevated this craft to an artistic level and maintained excellent paper quality. This was made possible through the hereditary transmission of craft knowledge within families across generations.” [3].

The largest concentration of paper workshops was located in Mo‘i Muborak, where dozens of workshops were constructed along the irrigation canal of the same name. Based on the aforementioned historical accounts, it may be concluded that paper-making in Kokand emerged in the eighteenth century, following the migration of Samarqand craftsmen to the region, and reached its peak in the second half of the nineteenth century. The techniques applied were rooted in Chinese paper-making traditions. However, certain intriguing accounts provided by local historians and intellectuals indicate the need for further in-depth investigation to determine precisely when the Kokand school of paper-making first originated.

One such narrative, recorded by Sultonxon Satvoldiev—former director of the Ferghana Regional Museum of Literature and Art in Kokand—attributes the establishment of paper-making to Tangriyor Sultan, a Kokand ruler. According to this account, in the early seventeenth century, Tangriyor Sultan invited two brothers, Normuhammad and Ahmad Okhun, from the town of Khotan in Eastern Turkestan. They settled near Mo‘i Muborak and established paper workshops along its water-rich canal, where they trained local youths who later became skilled masters of the craft [4].

Although these accounts lack firm historical evidence, they are valuable for emphasising two important points: (1) the technique was indeed based on Chinese traditions; and (2) paper-making may have existed in Kokand as early as the seventeenth century—an idea requiring further scholarly exploration.

Archival records of the Kokand Khanate and the literary heritage of Kokand calligraphers confirm that the industry flourished in the nineteenth century. According to local historiography, prominent workshop owners such as Yodgorboy, Madaminboy, and Mamadali gained fame across Central Asia, and Kokand paper even reached Egypt.

However, the Kokand school of paper-making later experienced severe challenges. Between 1863 and 1873, the palace of Khudoyor Khan was constructed, with the celebrated potter Kali Abdulla from Rishton overseeing the installation of glazed tiles. Rumours arose that the decorations were unstable, prompting the Khan to question the master. As the story goes, Abdulla led the Khan to the rooftop, where he placed a bowl filled with millet at the highest point of the mezana (the place for the call to prayer). Despite calm weather, the millet grains gradually began to scatter. Abdulla explained that the vibrations came from the objuvoz (stamp mills) in Mo‘i Muborak. He advised relocating the paper mills 3–4 kilometres away to ensure the palace’s longevity. Concerned with preserving the symbol of his authority, the Khan ordered the relocation of paper-makers to the villages of Qalacha and Tul in the Sokh region, 70–80 kilometres from Kokand.

According to the elderly teacher Ehsonali Tursunov of Mo‘i Muborak, Mamadali built new paper mills on the banks of the river—first in Qalacha, later in Ghaznov—passing the craft to his descendants. These mills remained active until political instability engulfed Turkestan.

Master Yodgorboy and his son Qodirali, following an invitation from the Emir of Bukhara, introduced paper-making to the Shofirkon district. The paper they produced impressed the Emir greatly, and one source even claims that Qodirali was married to a concubine of the Emir. After the fall of the Bukhara Emirate in 1920, they returned to Kokand and lived thereafter as farmers.

Oral testimonies of elderly residents of Qalacha—particularly the recollections of Mirzali, Sharifjon, and Bobojon ota—provide further insights. Bobojon ota Latipov recalled that during his youth in the 1930s, the objuvoz mills operated day and night along the Söx

River. Renowned poets Charxiy and Chustiy also noted these impressions in their writings. Bobojon stated that Kokand masters such as Solihboyvachcha, Karimchaboy, and Madaliboy built these mills. Paper-making required an abundant supply of clean running water, which explains why Qalacha was chosen. Paper production continued there until the early 1930s, when cotton cultivation displaced the industry. Many workshop owners were exiled or persecuted during the Stalinist purges; mills were demolished, their basins filled with stones, and cheaper Russian paper replaced local products. Thus, the once-celebrated Kokand school of paper-making fell victim to political repression.

During World War II, due to acute shortages of paper, limited production was briefly resumed for kolkhoz needs.

According to oral memory, Qalacha paper was transported by camel caravans to Afghanistan, Badakhshan, Khorasan, and various towns and villages across Turkestan. Overall, available evidence demonstrates that paper-making in Kokand has a long-standing history—emerging possibly in the seventeenth century and flourishing in the nineteenth.

Kokand craftsmen produced a wide range of paper types. Their paper, noted for its superior quality, was exported to Kashgar, northern Afghanistan, and even Egypt. According to a scholarly article published in the Afghan journal Farhangi Mardum, Kokand paper was used for minting currency in the Bukhara Emirate [5].

Kokand paper rivalled Chinese paper in transparency, durability, and fineness. Its clarity was such that inscriptions written on it could be read from the reverse side. The paper did not quickly dissolve in water and stretched rather than tore when pulled; when twisted into rope (piltā), it could bear considerable weight. It was even used in the ornamentation of caps (doppi). Specialists identify nearly ten varieties of Kokand paper. High-grade types included abribahor, abrishem, and haftrang, each produced from different raw materials. For example, abribahor was made from Egyptian cotton and commonly used for bookbinding; it was polished with egg yolk for a glossy finish and was the most expensive paper sold in the shops of sahhof (bookbinders).

Kokand calligrapher Rojiy Khoqandiy was a master of producing multi-coloured abri (marbled) paper. Another master, Mirzo Khayrullo Mirzo Khoqandiy Mirzo Nosir og‘li, teacher of the poet Asqarali Charxiy, was also highly skilled in producing abribahor. The production of haftrang paper required exceptional mastery; manuscripts written on this paper displayed sheets that shimmered in different shades, enhancing the reader’s experience. Among notable examples is a 48-folio collection of selected ghazals by Mirzo Bedil and poems by Furqat, Almaiy, and Zavqiy, copied by calligrapher Muhammad Tohir Khoqandiy. This manuscript is preserved today in the Ferghana Regional Museum of Literature and Art.

Despite the lack of explicit references in earlier research to silk-based paper in Kokand, A. A. Semyonov, familiar with local paper-making practices, wrote that “Kokand masters were highly proficient in producing silk paper, and demonstrated their skills to artisans in Bukhara.” [6]. Scholar Ibrohim Odilov supports this claim. Abrishem paper was produced from silk and silk-waste materials, and was commonly used for sacred manuscripts, Arabic grammar texts, and literary works. Prominent examples include an 1873 Kokand manuscript of At-tasrif al-Izzi and an 1875 copy of Al-qofiya, both written in nastaliq script on silk paper.

Although silk paper was expensive and thus produced in limited quantities, it remained in demand for elite commissions and for use in official correspondence, decrees, and diplomatic documents of the khanate.

In the late Soviet period, miniature painter Shomahmud Muhammadjonov and ornamental artist Ma’ruf Salimov succeeded in partially reviving the Kokand method of producing abri paper (c. 1980s). Mulberry bark served as the primary raw material in this reconstruction of traditional techniques.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It should be emphasised that every manuscript book, regarded as a work of artistic craftsmanship, was the result of collaborative creative labour involving several specialists: the sahhof (bookbinder), musavvir (ornamental painter), jadvalkash (artisan decorating the text within ruled frames), lawwah (the artisan transferring and arranging the main text into the margins), qog‘ozrez (paper cutter and preparer), and abroz (master of abri or marbled paper). The term abro, derived from Persian and meaning “cloud”, also conveys the sense of “spring rain water”. This cloud-like, marble-patterned paper was widely used to embellish high-value artistic manuscripts, letters, and certain miniatures.

The earliest examples of abri paper date to the sixteenth century, and the Manuscripts Collection of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan preserves several manuscripts decorated with such paper. In Central Asia, the practice of decorating manuscripts with abri paper became widespread. The last great master of this art in the region was the noted poet and calligrapher Mirza Khayrulla Khoqandiy [7]. With his death in 1942, the

traditional knowledge of preparing abri paper disappeared. Today, however, this art continues to be preserved and highly valued in Turkey and several other Eastern countries.

General information regarding the technology of abri paper production—its raw materials, tools, and equipment—can be found in the works of several scholars, including A. Yu. Kaziev [8]. More recently, T. Zufarov, a researcher at the Institute of Manuscripts of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, achieved notable progress in clarifying the methods of abri production in his 1983 article “On Abri Paper”.

Various types of abri paper were produced, including sochma abri, tarama abri, marmar abri, bulbul abri, and kelket (fir-tree patterned) abri. Lower-grade papers such as hashaki, o‘rama, uvada, and jaydari were used mainly for wrapping goods, while tappi paper served the function of cardboard. Calligrapher Rojiy Khoqandiy’s verses written in white powder on jet-black paper attest to the diverse applications of Kokand paper. Depending on its intended use, Kokand paper was produced in various qualities, including high-grade, medium-grade, and low-grade varieties for official correspondence.

During the nineteenth century, several important literary works were copied onto thick Kokand paper (two sheets pasted together), including the Divan-i Lutfiy, the Divan-i Fuzuli copied by calligrapher Mirza Sharif Dabir, and the Chahar Divan of Mir Alisher Navoi copied by Mulla Sarimsoq Khoqandiy. Historical sources confirm that Kokand paper pulp was widely used in bookbinding and even in jewellery-making.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the development of education, science, and culture in Kokand, along with the growth of economic capacity, generated significant demand for paper, stimulating the rapid expansion of the craft. Indeed, this period witnessed the flourishing of the Kokand literary environment, represented by such distinguished poets as Amiri (Umar Khan of Kokand), Boqikhonto‘ra, Gulkhaniy, Yoriy, Khoqandiy, Zavqiy, Zariy, Mahjub, Mahmur, Muqimiy, Muxtasib, Mushri, Muhammad Yusuf Toib, Muhiy, Muhsiniy, Nasimiy, Nizomiy, Nodir, Nozil, Pisandiy, Rojiy, Sadoiy, Furqat, and Shuhrat.

In the early twentieth century, crafts and arts in which paper served as an essential material—bookbinding, calligraphy, miniature painting, manuscript production, and lithographic printing—developed considerably in Kokand. Although lithographic printing had already been introduced, calligraphy retained its central role. Before copying a manuscript, the calligrapher had to prepare the book’s foundation by arranging blank sheets to the required format. Multiple artisans then contributed to the creation of a single manuscript: the paper was first cut to uniform size by an usta; the calligrapher copied the text, either page by page or in sections; the decorated text was then framed by the lawwah; and finally, the bookbinder assembled the manuscript. Eastern calligraphy produced various scripts—from the ancient Kufic to nastaliq—many of which were used sparingly in Kokand manuscripts. Kokand qit‘a (calligraphic panels) are distinguished by their elegant compositions and concise quatrains. Numerous Kokand calligraphers were also poets, historians, and miniature painters, elevating calligraphy to the level of a national art form [9].

Kokand paper enjoyed high demand not only locally but even in parts of Russia. During the final years of World War I, the shortage of Russian factory-made paper significantly increased interest in Kokand paper. The Turkestan regional administration, facing severe paper shortages, resorted to using Kokand paper for official correspondence. Consequently, documents written on Kokand paper reached governmental offices in St Petersburg, where previously only high-quality imported papers had been used. According to A. A. Semyonov, Kokand paper exceeded expectations: it fed smoothly through typewriters, producing clear print, and when used for handwriting, steel pens glided effortlessly over its surface. Officials in St Petersburg soon began requesting supplies of this remarkable paper [10].

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the Kokand school of paper-making played a prominent role in the cultural and economic landscape of the Eastern world. Renowned for the exceptional quality, durability, and aesthetic refinement of its products, Kokand paper supplied a wide geographical region—including Central Asia, Khorasan, Eastern Turkestan, and even administrative institutions of Tsarist Russia. The technological continuity preserved by generations of master craftsmen, the diversity of paper types produced, and the integration of paper-making into broader artistic traditions such as calligraphy, bookbinding, and miniature painting collectively demonstrate the significance of Kokand’s contribution to the history of paper production in the East. The enduring reputation of Kokand paper underscores its importance not only as a craft but also as a cultural heritage that shaped intellectual and artistic life across vast territories.

REFERENCES

1. Potanin, V. (1860). Показания сибирского казака Максимова, Кокандские владения (22 стр.). СПБ.
2. Собир, Н. (1991, 11 май). Қўқон қоғози. Халқ сўзи.

3. Хабибуллаев, Н. (1992). Ўрта Осиёда қоғоз ишлаб чиқариш тарихи (14 б.). Т.

4. Абдулахатов, Н., & Ҳошимов, Б. (2000). Мўйи Муборак (18 б.). Ф.

5. Собир, Н. (1991). Ўша жойда.

6. Вестник истории мировой культуры. (1957). М.: БСЭ.

7. Лихачев, Н. П. (1892). Бумага и бумажные мельницы в Московском государстве. СПБ.

8. Казиев, А. Ю. (1968). Художественно-технические материалы средневековой рукописи (34 б.). Баку.

9. Муродов, А. (1971). Ўрта Осиё ҳаттотлик санъати тарихидан (122–123 б.). Т.

10. Якобжанов, Ж. (2025). Study of the cultural life of the Kokand Khanate during independence. Международный мультидисциплинарный журнал исследований и разработок, 1(5), 173–178.