



# The State of Cotton Cultivation in the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic

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**Abstract:** After the establishment of the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic, the most pressing task for the government was the development of the national economy. To achieve this, the restoration of agriculture was of primary importance. Cotton cultivation, being the most profitable sector of agriculture, had faced severe difficulties at the time, and productivity had significantly decreased. This article outlines the measures taken to develop the cotton sector in the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic after its formation.

**Keywords:** Khorezm People's Soviet Republic, Agriculture, Khorezm Economic Council, Cotton Sector, Russo-Khorezm Cotton Company, Cotton Ginning Factory, Land, Water Issues

## Introduction

The state of cotton cultivation in the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic (XXSR) was an essential aspect of the region's agricultural recovery following its establishment in 1920. After the revolution and the formation of the Soviet government in Khorezm, the primary objective was to restore the economy, with a particular focus on revitalizing agriculture, which had suffered greatly during the upheaval. Cotton, as one of the most lucrative crops in the region, became a central focus for the new Soviet authorities. The Khorezm People's Soviet Republic aimed to increase cotton production to meet the growing demand in Soviet Russia, which relied heavily on Khorezm's cotton as an important raw material. In the early years, the cotton industry was severely damaged by the political instability and war. However, the Soviet government took several steps to restore it. One of the first priorities was addressing land and water issues, which had been significant barriers to cotton production. Following the redistribution of land and the nationalization of large estates, the government aimed to modernize irrigation systems, build new canals, and introduce

mechanized pumps for more efficient water usage. To encourage cotton cultivation, farmers were provided with low-interest loans, tax exemptions, and other incentives. The government also worked to ensure that cotton was the primary crop, often at the expense of food crops, which led to food shortages in some areas. By 1923, the cotton-growing area had expanded significantly, and production began to rise steadily.

## Methodology

The cotton industry was largely controlled by state-run entities, such as the Russia-Khorezm Cotton Company, which handled the purchase, processing, and distribution of cotton. While the cotton industry was revitalized, the entire harvest was often sent to Russia, leaving little to support local economic development or food security. On February 2, 1920, under pressure from Red Army units and young Xivans, the Khan of Khiva, Said Abdullakhon, signed a manifesto renouncing the throne. Thus, with the help of the Red Army, a coup was carried out in Khiva, overthrowing the monarchy. Russian ruling circles, the Turkestan Commission, and representatives of the Turkfront referred to the coup in Khiva as a “revolutionary movement” and “people's revolution,” although these actions were carried out not by internal forces through peaceful means, but by external powers—the Soviet Russia and Bolshevik military units (Ren, 2023).

From April 26–30, 1920, the First Congress of Khorezm People's Representatives was held in Khiva, where the Khorezm Soviet People's Republic (XXSR) was declared. After its establishment, the primary task of the government was to restore the national economy by modernizing it. The economy of the XXSR was based on agriculture, animal husbandry, local crafts, and, to some extent, industry. In agriculture, cotton farming was of primary importance, along with animal husbandry, meat, leather, and wool production. In 1917, there were 107,600 households in the Khiva Khanate, of which more than 91% were engaged in agriculture. By 1920, the number of households had decreased to 76,270, and the area of cultivated land had shrunk by 66.7%. The government of the Khorezm Soviet People's Republic began its work in a situation where the entire economy of the region had been devastated. In particular, the cotton industry, which had been a major source of income before the war, had been ruined. Specifically, in the Khiva Khanate in 1915, the total cotton harvest amounted to 1.74 million poods, while by 1920, it had fallen to 100,000 poods, a reduction of almost 18 times over a period of 5-6 years (Peña-Gallardo, 2019).

Furthermore, by 1920, there were 33 cotton ginning factories in Khorezm, excluding small factories. They were located in New Urganch (5), Gurlan (4), Khonqa (3), Toshhovuz (5), Mangit (4), Ilya (1), Hazorasp (3), Khojayli (4), Pitnak (1), Kangyrat (1), Khiva (1), and Ostanabozor (1). However, most of these factories were destroyed as a result of military actions by the Red Army in the Khiva Khanate (CAU. R-73).

Historically, the main focus of agriculture in Khorezm was on wheat, rice, and cotton cultivation, with particular emphasis on cotton after the Bolsheviks came to power. The primary goal was to meet the cotton needs of Russia by developing cotton farming in the

Khorezm Soviet People's Republic (XXSR). To restore cotton farming, the most pressing issue was addressing land and water management.

The Khiva Khanate, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, operated under a feudal monarchy system. The land and water ownership followed the regulations established over the centuries. There were three main types of land ownership in the Khiva Khanate: state land ownership, private land ownership, and waqf (endowment) land ownership. Large landowners usually had their estates near the head or middle parts of main canals where water was more accessible, while the land of poor farmers, who suffered from the hardship of irrigation, was located at the end of these canals (Brito, 2024).

## Result and Discussion

After the fall of the Khiva Khanate and the establishment of the XXSR, the government confiscated large portions of land belonging to the Khan, his officials, and wealthy landowners, redistributing it to poor farmers. Additionally, the income from waqf lands was used to cover the expenses of mosques, madrasas, cemeteries, and the stipends and salaries of students, teachers, and trustees. In fact, waqf lands accounted for 50% of the arable land in the country. The Bolsheviks took measures to quickly bring waqf lands under state control. In 1923, the Fourth Congress of All-Khorezm People's Representatives adopted the "Law on Waqf Lands," which declared all waqf lands to be state property. As a result, 1,272 religious institutions, including 500,000 tanobs of land, 178,000 of which were arable, were deprived of their land (Singh, 2021).

Between 1920 and 1924, during the formation and development of the Khorezm Republic, regulating water use and constructing irrigation canals became one of the key aspects of the XXSR's agrarian policy. During this time, the irrigation infrastructure in the republic had deteriorated and was in need of repair. The RSFSR allocated a loan of 1,476,742 som to improve irrigation infrastructure. As a result, in 1922-1923, 13 dams, 8 water reservoirs, and 2 irrigation channels were constructed and put into operation. The main goal of these projects was to increase agricultural productivity and facilitate the export of agricultural products, especially cotton, to Russia. In fact, in 1921 alone, 200,000 poods of cotton were sent to Russia (José, 2022).

From December 4-11, 1921, the first congress of landless and poor farmers was held in Khiva. During this congress, issues such as providing land, water, work animals, tools, seeds, and debt relief were discussed. To ensure continued credit support for farmers, it was decided to establish an agricultural bank. Based on the congress's decision, in the spring of 1922, an agricultural bank with a capital of 3 billion som was founded. In the same year, the bank provided 1.5 billion som in loans to poor farmers (Sengupta, 2023).

The Khorezm government allocated a significant amount of funds—nearly 1 million som—with the aim of restoring, launching, and constructing new national industries. In addition, the RSFSR government provided a loan of 575,006 som to start cotton ginning and oil production factories. As a result of these efforts, by the beginning of 1924, 6 cotton

ginning factories, 1 oil factory, and other industrial facilities were put into operation (Nazikova, 2020).

Trade relations between Khorezm and the RSFSR were reestablished in the second half of 1920. During this period, Khorezm sent 150,000 poods of cotton fiber to Russia. In June 1921, the Khorezm government established a special "Cotton Committee." The committee was structured with departments for administration, cooperation, and technology. The responsibilities of the Cotton Committee included:

1. Accepting and launching all nationalized cotton and oil production factories from the RSFSR's Fourkuld cotton department
2. Bringing the cotton industry under state control and nationalizing cotton fiber for state purposes
3. Engaging farmers in specialized cooperative branches and ensuring their management at the local level (CAU. R-73)..

In order to take the initiative into its own hands, the RSFSR Main Cotton Committee established connections with the "Khorezm Cotton Committee." In 1921, the Khorezm Cotton Committee received a loan of 97 million som from the RSFSR Main Cotton Committee, along with 95,987 arshins (approximately 60-70 cm per arshin) of manufactured goods, 1,549 poods of kerosene, 100,000 matchboxes, 6,650 spools, and threads of various colors, which were then distributed to the cotton farmers (Eyferth, 2022). Due to Russia's significant demand for Khorezm's raw materials, particularly cotton, it had a vested interest in boosting the region's agriculture. In response, the Khorezm government implemented several measures to increase the material incentives for farmers. Cotton growers were granted various benefits, including long-term loans at very low interest rates, reduced taxes, and in some cases, complete exemptions from them. In the beginning of 1922, the Khorezm People's Commissariat (MIK) allocated 250 million som in concessional loans for the cotton planting campaign. These funds were used to expand irrigation systems, dig new ditches and canals, and strengthen river and canal embankments (CAU. R-73).

Additionally, for every 50 poods of cotton harvested, farmers were awarded two hoes, six pounds of oil, five poods of seed, 50 pounds of salt, and 90 arshins of manufactured goods (cloth). As a result of these initiatives, cotton planting and production in Khorezm grew rapidly. For example, in 1921-1922, the total cultivated area in the Khorezm Republic was 461,666 tanobs, and by 1923-1924, it increased to 509,555 tanobs. During this period, cotton fields expanded from 3,000 desyatins (1 desyatina = 1.08 hectares) to 18,000 desyatins. The cotton yield increased significantly as well, from 250,000 poods in 1922 to 800,000 poods in 1924. However, the allocation of irrigated land for food crops to cotton cultivation exacerbated the food supply problem.

To further develop cotton farming in the XXSR, the Russia-Khorezm State Cotton Company was established on February 19, 1923. The main tasks of the Russia-Khorezm Cotton Company were as follows:

1. Expanding the area of cotton cultivation and ensuring financial support.

2. Registering and launching cotton ginning, oil, and soap factories in the XXSR territory.
3. Selling and purchasing raw cotton.
4. Providing credit to peasant farms and establishing trade relations with Russian and foreign firms.
5. Importing and distributing cotton by-products from the RSFSR and its republics.
6. Importing the necessary machinery and equipment for cotton ginning and oil production from abroad, with the approval of the USSR People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs.
7. Storing cotton and cotton products belonging to the company in the RSFSR and delivering them to their destinations by railway and water transport [4].

On November 21, 1923, the Khorezm Economic Council presented a report to the

Central Committee of the Khorezm Communist Party, stating that over the past six months, the company had opened six cotton reception points in Khorezm, repaired and prepared three cotton ginning factories for operation, and sent 20 wagons of cotton fiber to Moscow. Additionally, 25,000 poods of raw cotton were ready for shipment.

In its report to the Central Asian Economic Council on the overall and individual value of cotton ginning factories in Khorezm, the Russia-Khorezm Cotton Company provided the following information: The total value of the cotton ginning and soap production factories in Khorezm was 463,343 rubles 14 kopecks. These included: the former Oltibosh cotton ginning factory in Khiva valued at 44,621 rubles 55 kopecks; the Yaroslavskiy cotton and soap factory in New Urganch valued at 100,820 rubles 90 kopecks; the Kraft-owned soap and cotton ginning factory in New Urganch valued at 142,727 rubles 24 kopecks; the Baqqolov cotton factory in New Urganch valued at 5,490 rubles 97 kopecks; the Yaroslavskiy cotton factory in Toshhovuz valued at 21,217 rubles 76 kopecks; the Manuilov cotton factory in Gurland valued at 41,155 rubles 52 kopecks; the Azizboy Madyorov cotton factory in Khonqa valued at 35,491 rubles 41 kopecks; and the cotton ginning factory in Khazorasp valued at 17,219 rubles.

At a meeting on November 2, 1923, the Central Committee of the Khorezm Communist Party decided to transfer the aforementioned cotton ginning and soap production factories to the Russia-Khorezm Cotton Company. Overall, the company carried out its activities based on the directives of the Khorezm Economic Council. As a result of the transfer of cotton factories and lands into state ownership, the system of property relations was abolished.

The Russia-Khorezm Cotton Company was a legal entity with its own seal and had significant influence over the cotton industry in Khorezm. The company's capital amounted to 1,500,000 rubles, with 50% of the investment held by the Khorezm Economic Council and the other 50% by the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic).

## Conclusion



The Russia-Khorezm Cotton Company played a key role in the restoration of cotton farming in Khorezm. Its efforts were instrumental in the broader revival of Khorezm's agricultural sector. Specifically, unused lands were reclaimed for cotton cultivation, the area of cotton fields expanded, and new irrigation systems, including mechanical pumps, were introduced to facilitate irrigation. Additionally, the cotton industry, which had been devastated during the war, was largely restored. However, despite these advancements, all of the cotton produced was exported to Russia, further reinforcing the economic dependency of Khorezm on the Russian Federation.

In summary, cotton cultivation in the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic became a symbol of the broader agricultural and economic strategies implemented by the Soviet government. While it helped revive the local economy and supported Soviet industrial needs, it also exposed the region's dependence on Soviet policies and the challenges of balancing cash crop production with local food needs.

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