Irrigation System in Khorasan During the Reign

of Abu Said Mirza

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Abstract This article highlights the high-level attention given by the Timurid ruler Abu Said Mirza to the irrigation system in Khorasan.

Keywords: Abu Sad Mirza, Qutbiddin Tovus Simnoniy, Abdurazzoq Samarqandiy, Juyi Sultoniy canal, Gulistan dam.

Introduction

Abu Said Mirza (1424-1469) was imprisoned by Abdulatif in 1450 during the power struggle for the throne following the deaths of Shahrukh Mirza and Mirza Ulugbek. He was released after Abdulatif's death. With the help of Abulkhairkhan, Sultan Abu Said Mirza seized the throne of Samarkand in 1451. After the death of Khorasan ruler Abulqasim Babur in 1458, he took control of Herat, Mazandaran, and Astrabad, thereby strengthening the central government. Nevertheless, the western part of the country remained unstable. When Western Iran came under the control of the Qara Qoyunlu, Abu Said Mirza began a war against them in 1468. However, in 1469, he was killed in a battle with the Aq Qoyunlu in the Mughan steppe.

Although Abu Said Mirza's reign was characterized by struggles for the throne, he did not neglect the development of agriculture and the irrigation system. Abu Said Mirza expanded the cultivated areas and ordered the construction of a new canal to irrigate the developed lands and increase crop yields. We have not encountered information in historical sources about Abu Said Mirza's constructive work on the irrigation system of Transoxiana. His activities in this direction may have escaped the attention of historians of that period.

According to Abdurazzoq Samarqandi's work "Matlai sa'dayn va majmai bahrayn," on the orders of Sultan Abu Said, under the leadership of vizier Qutbiddin Tavus Simnoniy, the Juyi Sultoniy canal was excavated in Khorasan. The canal was dug approximately 22 km (4 farsakhs) east of the city of Herat, cutting through rocks between mountains. In most places, rocks were cut and water was drawn using the kanavat (trench) method. Numerous bridges were constructed, and large surrounding stones were broken. After several months, a significant amount of water was

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channeled to the center of Mount Mukhtar. As a result, cultivated fields were established in the steppe lands of the Gozurgoh mausoleum, located north of Herat, and in the areas of the Bovilgoh desert, leading to increased crop yields. Abdurazzaq Samarqandi evaluates the scale of these constructions as follows: "In the two to three thousand years since the city of Herat was founded, no one had been able to accomplish such a feat" [1:600-601]. In his scientific research, Terry Allen cites all the above information and suggests that Abdurazzaq Samarkandi exaggerated the length of the Juyi Sultoniy canal. According to Terry Allen, water was supplied to the areas in the Bovilgoh Desert west of Gozurgoh from a different canal [2:24].

To substantiate and supplement the above information, we present the following data. Tajik scholar N. Mahmudov writes that during the reign of Abu Said Mirza, the large Juyi Sultoniy Canal, originating from the Pashtan River near Herat, was constructed. During the reign of Sultan Husayn, this canal was expanded and extended to the Gozurgoh area of Herat. The water from this canal irrigated lands from the Pashtan River to the village of Saq Salman, covering a distance of six farsakhs (36 km) [3:22]. Turkish scholar M. Shahin also included this information in his doctoral dissertation [4:207]. In his article, Turkish researcher H. Akbiyik cited the following information from Isfizari about Juyi Sultoniy: "There was no other water source in the city besides Juvije in Herat, and the condition of the gardens and vineyards was poor. However, the gardens and pastures, especially those around Gozurgoh, flourished with the help of Sultan Abu Said. The length of the canal was one league (about 6 km) from Gozurgoh to Chashmai Mohiyon and six leagues (36 km) from Pashtan to the village of Saq Salman"[5:160].

Currently, the Juyi Sultani Canal is fed by the waters of the Pashtan Dam. The Pashtan Dam was built on the Karukh River, which is considered a right tributary of the Herirud River[7]. The Juyi Sultani Canal, excavated from the Karukh River by decree of Sultan Abu Said, has been supplying Herat with water for centuries, thanks to the attention and care of the local population.

According to Mustafo Shahin, the irrigation canal stretching four farsakh northwest of Herat was reconstructed during the reign of Mirza Abu Said[8:206].

Abu Said Mirza's focus on the irrigation system laid the foundation for the development of Herat's lands and the further advancement of agriculture. Turkish scholar Ismail Aka provides the following information on this matter: "When Abu Said Mirza arrived at the Niratu fortress near Herat in September 863/1459, he ordered the distribution of grain and oxen reserved for sowing to cultivate all fertile lands. Vizier Khoja Qutbiddin Simnani had 7,000 mule-loads of grain stored annually in Khorasan. Under the vizier's leadership (873/1468-1469), vast territories were developed in the northeast of Herat using water from a new canal 4 farsakhs long"[9:13]. This information is described in Abdurazzoq Samarqandi's "Matlai sa'dayn va majmai bahrayn" as follows: Because there were many cultivated lands on the outskirts of the fortress and the saying "the crops there yield a hundredfold" had gained fame, His Majesty ordered, "Wherever it is possible to cultivate crops, Malik Nasir Simnani should provide seeds and oxen to convert them into croplands" [10:487]. According to Abdurazzaq Samarqandi, Abu Said Mirza entrusted Malik Nasir Simnani with sowing seeds on the lands surrounding the Niratu fortress.

After the death of Shahrukh Mirzo, the power struggles among Timurid princes for the throne had a negative impact on the economic life of Khorasan. Abu Said Mirzo, who ascended to the throne following these conflicts, took practical measures to restore Khorasan's economy, agriculture, and irrigation system. During this period, the country's security was ensured. Abu Said Mirzo managed

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to bring economic stability, prosperity, and progress to Khorasan in a short time. Abu Said Mirzo and Sultan Husayn Boyqaro strived to continue the work initiated by Shahrukh Mirzo. Their efforts in improving the irrigation system led to the expansion of cultivated lands and an increase in agricultural production.

The city of Mashhad is situated in an arid and semi-arid region due to its geographical location. During the Timurid era, several dams were constructed to supply water to the city of Mashhad. There are various debates among researchers about when the Gulistan Dam, which existed at that time, was built. Clevenjer notes that the historical evidence regarding the Gulistan Dam is contradictory. Local authors attribute the dam's construction to Gulistan, the sister of Gavharshodbegim, who was the wife of Shahrukh Mirza. However, a decree by Abu Said indicates that the dam belonged to him. According to Clevenjer's hypothesis, the dam was originally built during the Ilkhanid era and later renovated during the Timurid period[11:391]. Iranian researchers, based on a historical document, estimate that the Gulistan Dam was constructed 550 years ago, specifically between 1451 and 1477. The document mentions Sultan Abu Said Mirza appointing Mawlana Qutbiddin Muhammad Hafi as a representative to resolve a dispute over the dam's water distribution[12:68]. Kholam Reza Kuros and Majid Labbaf Haniki note that the Gulistan Dam was built on the Torqabeh River, approximately 30 km north of Mashhad, and suggest it was constructed simultaneously with the Gavharshad Begum Mosque. The dam's exterior is brick-clad, while its core is filled with stone and lime concrete. Its thickness measures about 15 meters at the top and 22 meters at the base. A lower outlet is installed for sediment removal. The water tower features four gates at different heights, connected to the dam body like other ancient dams. Spiral staircases inside the tower provide access to these gates [13:120-121]. Bernard O'Keyn, discussing dams built in Khorasan during the Timurid period, states that although Shahrukh Mirza did not construct the Kirat, Akhlamad, and Gulistan dams, a law for proper water distribution was developed in Herat during his reign, later revised under Abu Said's rule. O'Keyn also notes that Sultan Abu Said repaired the Gulistan Dam[14:15]. Furthermore, O'Keyn observes the similarity between the Gulistan Dam and the Turuq Dam, concluding that the former dates back to the 15th century. Bernard O'Keyn highlights the existence of debates regarding the builder of the dam, citing Sultan Abu Said's decree to his two agents (servants) as the most concrete evidence. This decree ordered the transfer of lands irrigated by the dam to the ruler's ownership and the closure of the dam[15:31]. Maria Subtelni writes that Sultan Abu Said, continuing the work of Shahrukh Mirza, developed the Mashhad region and constructed the Gulistan Dam on a branch of the Kashaf River, which flows through Mashhad[16:127]. The authors of the Islamic Encyclopedia state that the Gulistan Dam was built by Abu Said Mirza, basing this information on the book by Dr. Abdulhusayn Navoi[17:869]. In the collection "Historical Documents and Letters of Iran (from Timur to Shah Ismail)", compiled by the Iranian scholar Abdulhusayn Navoi, the text of Sultan Abu Said's decree to the people of Tus and Mashhad approving the proposal to close the Gulistan Dam has been published. The content of this decree is as follows:

SIGN OF SULTAN ABU SAID MIRZA ON THE LINKING OF THE BANDY GULISTAN DAM TO MASHHADI MUQADDAS

Let the blessed ones, governors, judges and sheikhs, rulers and nobles, saints and dignitaries, ambassadors, and the people of Tus and Mashhad provinces know that ensuring and developing

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the country is a means of earning His Majesty's pleasure and achieving religious and worldly benefits. It is inevitable that Hazrat's success, enveloped in the attributes of Gulistan, should be conveyed to all countries surrounded by the clouds of companions' attributes, let them convey it to all kingdoms, and may He accept the state of the kingdom and people from the grace of the springs of mercy, freshness, and control. Based on this, the proposal to close the Gulistan-i-Sharif dam should be approved, and once the state reaches its conclusion, it should be noted that the lands of the muluk arbob cultivated from its water are the property of God, and some are waqf from each chapter. For Khotiri Humayun, it is very necessary that all those lands be in competition, and the method of Sharia exchange within private property is honorable. Therefore, it is no secret to Mawlana Qutbiddin Muhammad Khafi that he knows the rules of Sharia and the truths of custom. The essence of Ashraf and the denial of Aq and the general rule are more important than trade and evil, negotiations, claims, enmity, etc., and if there is a need for mediation and judgment, the gadi reaches there and issues a ruling according to Sharia. From this decree, it can be understood that the Gulistan Dam existed even before the reign of Sultan Abu Said Mirza. Sultan Abu Said Mirza may have approved the proposal to close the dam and had it repaired. Clevenjer and Bernard O'Keyn also noted in their research that the dam was renovated by Sultan Abu Said Mirza.

In recent years, the Gulistan Dam has undergone reconstruction. According to information provided by Muhammad Safi, its height was raised by approximately 5 meters in 1947. The maximum height from the foundation level is 21.5 meters. The dam is currently used for irrigation, but there is a risk of overflow if the water level rises [18:2]. Today, the Gulistan Dam has become one of the most remarkable tourist attractions in Mashhad, with numerous visitors coming every year to relax and enjoy their leisure time.

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