

## Construction Built for The Benefit of The People

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study explores the philanthropic legacy and infrastructural contributions of Chorikulboy Nafasov (1847/1852–1934), a notable figure from Romitan, Bukhara, with a focus on his pivotal role in regional development through the construction of the Chorikulboy Bridge. **Method:** Employing a historical-comparative approach, this research integrates oral history accounts and archival records to examine the bridge's construction (1911–1914), architectural design, and socio-economic implications. **Results:** The analysis reveals that, following restrictions on constructing religious institutions due to skepticism regarding the origins of his wealth, Chorikulboy redirected his efforts toward public infrastructure. Utilizing materials and engineering expertise from Europe, he constructed a hydrotechnical bridge over the Zarafshan River that remains operational today. The bridge not only demonstrated advanced structural durability and resilience against natural elements but also significantly enhanced regional trade and mobility. **Novelty:** This study offers new insights into Chorikulboy's transnational construction strategy, which integrated European and local building practices, and positions the bridge as a lasting monument of philanthropy and civil engineering innovation in Central Asia.

## INTRODUCTION

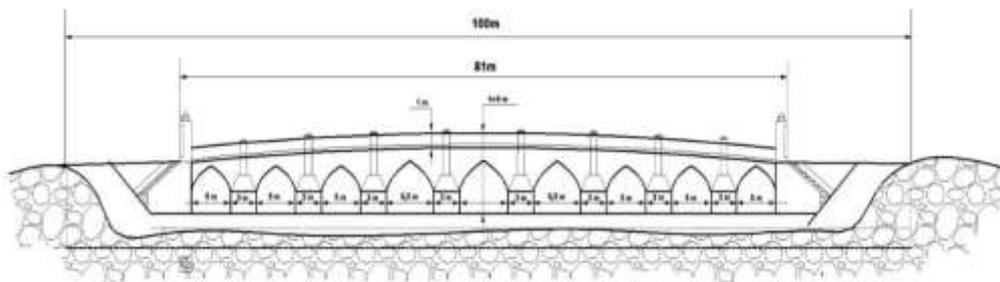
Chorikulboy Nafasov (1847/1852–1934), a wealthy philanthropist from Romitan, was one of the figures of his time who contributed to construction and urban development. He allocated a portion of his vast income from livestock to charitable causes, making philanthropy a core part of his economic activities. Information about this remarkable individual remains alive in the memory of the people. Among his contributions are the sturdy bridge over the Zarafshan River, a cultural center (club) along the Khayrobod canal, a small school for village children, and the canal that became the lifeblood of the Qoqishtuvon village in the Romitan district of the Bukhara region. The robust bridge constructed over the Zarafshan River between 1911 and 1914 is particularly important [1].

## RESEARCH METHOD

The object of the work is the Chorikulboy Bridge in the Romitan district of Bukhara region. The research is based on the following sources:

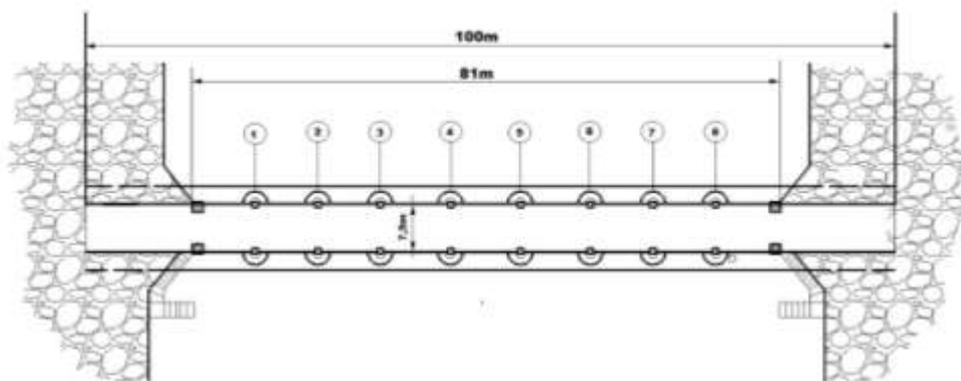
1. The results of studies of the economic life of the Bukhara Emirate and Russian Empire;
2. Field data records collected during research [2].

The article employs various methodological approaches, including historical comparative analysis, historical method, oral history, objectivity, and systematization of data [3]. **Figure 1** presents a cross-sectional schematic drawing of the Chorikulboy Bridge. It provides detailed insights into the precise architectural dimensions, including the overall length (100 meters including stair-like approaches), width (7.5 meters), and structural features such as the number of pillars (8 pillars), their heights (4 meters), widths (3.5 meters), and foundations (over 3 meters deep). The diagram clearly illustrates how the robust design contributes to the bridge's resilience, indicating its ability to withstand significant environmental pressures, including earthquakes.



**Figure 1.** Cross-sectional view and dimensions of the Chorikulboy Bridge

**Figure 2** provides an architectural depiction emphasizing the distinctive dome-like spherical surfaces of the Chorikulboy Bridge. The bridge consists of nine dome-shaped convex surfaces, each featuring a curvature radius ranging from 7.5 to 9 meters. This specific design not only enhances the bridge's visual aesthetic but also contributes substantially to its structural integrity and stability. The image highlights the combination of European engineering concepts with local construction materials and techniques.



**Figure 2.** Architectural design and structure of the Chorikulboy Bridge

**Figure 3** is a contemporary photograph capturing the current state of the Chorikulboy Bridge, constructed between 1911 and 1914. This visual documentation underscores the enduring structural integrity and ongoing functionality of the bridge as an essential transportation link across the Zarafshan River. The image also reflects the careful preservation and restoration efforts, maintaining its cultural heritage value and practical significance for the local community in the Bukhara region.



**Figure 3.** Present-day view of the Chorikulboy Bridge over the Zarafshan River

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the spring of 1909, Chorikulboy approached Qushbegi (prime minister) Ostonqulbiy with a proposal to build a significant structure for public benefit and charity, seeking permission to construct a mosque or madrasa. According to Islamic law, the wealth and income sources of anyone wishing to build a mosque or madrasa had to be thoroughly investigated. Consequently, the Emir tasked the Peshku Qozi (judge) with examining the matter. The investigation lasted several months. When the findings were ready, Chorikulboy visited the Qozi Kalon (chief judge) but was denied permission. The judge found some of the wealthy entrepreneur's income sources unclear and suggested possible involvement in usury. Other sources indicate that Chorikulboy initially intended to build a madrasa using his funds, but the religious council of the time refused permission, citing suspicions of usury in his wealth. Instead, they advised him to build something else that would benefit the people [4].

Sometime after these events, following the advice of a mufti, Chorikulboy again approached the Emir with a new proposal. This time, he sought permission to build a sturdy bridge over the Zarafshan River to replace the existing reed bridge. Due to the numerous complaints about the reed bridge, his request was granted, and the Emir issued a decree allowing the construction of the bridge [5].

Although permission to build the bridge was granted in late 1909, why did the process not begin until late 1911? After receiving the decree, Chorikulboy personally traveled to Europe with several knowledgeable assistants. He studied the architecture of bridges in Czechoslovakia, Germany, and France, consulting with local craftsmen and

architects. Once all the necessary materials and craftsmen were brought in, construction of the famous and robust hydrotechnical structure over the Zarafshan River began [6].

Chorikulboy summoned craftsmen from Germany to build the bridge. A specialist from Czechoslovakia was invited to design the bridge's blueprint. The required stone was transported from Gozgon and Karavulbazar. Workers from various ethnic groups were recruited, and even those who came to work voluntarily were paid. Cart drivers transporting stone and bricks were paid between 100 and 150 coins. Chorikulboy personally supervised the construction, rewarding those who worked diligently with sheep. Young children helping around the site were given lamb-skin hats [7].

At the repeated requests of entrepreneurs, especially those involved in the cotton trade, the construction of bridges over the Zarafshan River in the Laglaqa and Zirabulak areas began almost simultaneously. Given the scale of the project, it was necessary to consult with the Russian Empire's political agent in Bukhara. In the spring of 1912, a meeting was held involving Qushbegi Nasrullabiy, the Russian political agent A.S.Somov, and a group of the largest entrepreneurs in the Emirate. Some details of this meeting can be found in a letter dated October 18, 1912, from political agent A.S.Somov to the diplomatic official under the Turkestan Governor-General: "...A meeting with cotton industrialists was held this spring. In their previous appeals, they stated the need for six bridges over the Zarafshan River. In the latest meeting, they requested the construction of four wide and sturdy bridges in Zirabulak, Karmana, Laglaqa, and Gijduvan to facilitate the transportation of cotton to factories [8].

...Construction of the bridges in Zirabulak and Laglaqa has already begun. The Emirate is not requesting any financial support from the Russian government for this project. They are, however, requesting technical experts for supervision" [9].

In response to the political agent's request, a reply letter signed by Turkestan Governor-General A.V.Samsonov arrived on December 31, 1912. It granted official permission for the construction of the bridges and assigned supervision to Sakovich, the Governor-General's technical consultant. Under Sakovich's leadership, a group of architects inspected each of the four bridges and prepared cost estimates. According to the estimate approved on February 26, 1913, the initial cost for the bridge under construction in Laglaqa was set at 4,272,534 imperial rubles [10].

The construction of the bridges was closely monitored by both the Russian government and the Emirate [11]. In a letter dated September 3, 1913, from Semyonov, the acting diplomatic official under the Turkestan Governor-General, to the political agent, information was requested on the progress of the bridge construction and estimated completion dates [12]. The Chorikulboy Bridge in Laglaqa was completed in 1914 and handed over for public use. Upon completion, Chorikulboy had the following words inscribed on the left side of the bridge facing Bukhara: "I, Chorikulboy, built this bridge for the satisfaction of my people, the world's spirit and joy, the peace and love of my homeland, and to serve the happiness and future of humanity". On the dome facing the qibla, he inscribed: "Chorikulboy Pirnafasboy's son, 1914" [13].

Emir Sayyid Alimkhan and Qushbegi Nasrullabiy were invited to the bridge's opening ceremony. After the Emir's approval, carpets were laid on the bridge for a hundred meters in both directions, covered with brocade and velvet [14].

After completing the task, Emir Alimkhan was the first to cross the bridge, followed by the scattering of gold coins. A Khatm-i Quran (Quran recitation) was held, and by the Emir's order, the bridge was named after Chorikulboy. The newly appointed political agent A.K. Belyaev and several Russian architects also attended the opening ceremony [15].

## CONCLUSION

**Fundamental Finding :** This study affirms the Chorikulboy Bridge as a landmark of philanthropic vision and innovative engineering by Chorikulboy Nafasov, merging European architectural techniques with local materials and craftsmanship to produce a structurally resilient and culturally significant hydrotechnical work. **Implication :** The bridge exemplifies a model of sustainable infrastructure, offering valuable lessons for contemporary engineering practices and cultural heritage preservation. It also underscores the enduring impact of Islamic philanthropy in shaping urban development and public welfare in Central Asia. **Limitation :** However, the research is constrained by its reliance on oral histories and incomplete archival records, which may limit the precision and depth of historical and technical insights. **Future Research :** To advance understanding, future studies should adopt interdisciplinary approaches—integrating archaeology, materials science, and historical analysis—and conduct comparative evaluations with similar historical structures across Central Asia and beyond to contextualize the Chorikulboy Bridge's architectural legacy within a broader civilizational framework.

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