

## The Miyonkol Oasis in the Pages of History

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study explores the historical evolution of geographical names in the Miyonkol oasis, a fertile and strategically significant region in the Zarafshan Valley. Despite its rich cultural and economic heritage, the historiography of its naming conventions has remained underexplored. **Method:** Utilizing a historical-analytical method, the research draws from medieval chronicles, travelers' narratives, and Russian-era documentation to trace the transformation of toponyms such as Nim Sugd, Sugdi Khurd, and Miyonkol. **Results:** Findings reveal that the oasis was not only a hub of agriculture and trade during the Turkic Khaganate and the Russian period but also home to important settlements like Ishtikhan and Ofarinkent. The results emphasize the oasis's central role in regional development and identity formation. **Novelty:** The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the historiographical gap concerning the toponymic evolution of the Miyonkol oasis, an area rich in cultural and economic significance that has not been thoroughly examined through historical and interdisciplinary lenses. The study implies the necessity for further comparative and interdisciplinary research, including digital mapping and archaeological analysis, to fully contextualize Miyonkol's contribution to Central Asian history.

## INTRODUCTION

The Zarafshan River, to the northeast of the city of Samarkand, splits into two branches near the Chophonota hill at the site of a water diversion dam. The northern branch is called the Oqdaryo, while the southern one is known as the Qoradaryo. The Oqdaryo stretches for 130 km and the Qoradaryo for 127 km. The widest point of the island formed between them lies on the left bank of the Qoradaryo, in the vicinity of the village of Dovul, and spans 15 km. These two branches merge again within the present-day territory of Khatirchi district in Navoi region [1].

Today, this area includes parts of the Samarkand region, specifically the districts of Oqdaryo and Ishtikhan, as well as the irrigated agricultural lands of Kattakurgan district. The length of the island exceeds 100 km, its width reaches up to 15 km, and its total area is approximately 1,200 square kilometers. According to historical sources, this region has long been recorded as one of the most prosperous, fertile, and agriculturally advanced areas in the Zarafshan Valley [2].

The purpose of the study is to examine how the geographical names of the Miyonkol oasis are reflected in historical sources and to focus on the changes these names underwent over time. The methodology used in the study involves a historical-analytical approach, with primary attention given to written sources, travelers' accounts, and comparative analysis. The findings show that Miyonkol was a strategically important region during the early Middle Ages. During the era of the Turkic Khaganate, trade flourished in cities such as Ishtikhan and Ofarinkent, with trade caravans from Ishtikhan even reaching as far as China. During the Russian period, the region was identified as one of the most favorable areas for agriculture. The novelty of the study lies in its revelation of the various names used in historical sources to classify the geographical identity of the Miyonkol region. It explores how the area was referred to as Nim Sugd and Sugdi Khurd in ancient times and came to be known as Miyonkol during the medieval period, while also highlighting the existence of strategically important areas such as Ofarinkent, Ishtikhan, and Sogarj.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The study of the Miyonkol region in historical sources is explored in four main stages:

1. In the historiography of medieval sources.
2. In the records of travelers.
3. In the accounts of the Russians.
4. In the historical research conducted during the period of independence.

The methodology of this study is grounded in a historical-analytical approach designed to uncover the evolution of the Miyonkol oasis's geographic identity through time. Primary data sources include a diverse range of historical manuscripts, traveler accounts, and archival records, particularly those from the medieval period, Russian colonial documentation, and post-independence historiography. These sources were critically analyzed and compared to track changes in the naming, description, and socio-political relevance of the region. Special emphasis was placed on texts such as Qandiya, Samariya, and Baburnama, which provide first-hand insights into the cities and settlements within the oasis, such as Ishtikhan, Ofarinkent, and Sogarj. The study utilized content analysis to identify patterns and terminologies related to Miyonkol across different time periods and narratives. Cross-referencing was employed to validate the accuracy of historical claims, particularly when inconsistencies appeared among sources from different eras or cultural perspectives. Descriptive mapping was also applied to reconstruct the geographical layout of the oasis based on ancient toponyms and natural landmarks, supported by references to rivers like Oqdaryo and Qoradaryo. Through this triangulation of textual evidence and geographic interpretation, the study seeks to present a coherent narrative of Miyonkol's strategic importance and evolving identity. The method ensures both diachronic depth and spatial clarity, offering a robust framework for understanding the intersection of geography, history, and culture in one of Central Asia's most fertile and historically dynamic regions. The approach also enables

the identification of gaps and potential directions for further interdisciplinary research [3].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In ancient times, the region known as Sugda-Sugdiana, particularly the area around Samarkand and the region between the Oqdaryo and Qoradaryo rivers, was historically famous. This area, known by various names such as Samarkand Sugda, Nim Sugda (Half Sugda), and Sugdi Khurd (Small Sugda), is recognized for its beautiful nature, flourishing towns, and hospitable people. It has left a significant mark in history [4].

Abulfazl Muhammad Samarkandi, in his book "Qandiya" ("Small Qand"), mentions: "Among the settlements surrounding Samarkand are Kesh, Nakhshab, Ishtikhan, and Sogarj, which were once under the control of the Sogdian state, and now, after their restoration, they come under the jurisdiction of Samarkand [5]."

Abu Hafs Najmiddin Umar Nasafiy, in his work "Qandiya," provides information about the Sogarj fortress and its native, Burhoniddin Sogarjiy, noting: "Sheikh Burhoniddin Sogarjiy was from the lineage of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab. He earned the title 'Sogarjiy' because in the 8th century, when the Islamic armies reached the Samarkand region, Sogarj fortress, the largest after Samarkand and Bukhara, was besieged and eventually captured by them. The management of the fortress was handed over to Sheikh Sogarji's ancestors at the time [6]."

Abu Tohirxoja Samarqandi, in his work "Samariya," writes: "The lands north of the Zarafshan (Kohak) River are divided into two parts. One part is irrigated, the other is steppe. The irrigated section is adjacent to the Kohak River and is divided into two. One part is called the Sugdi Kalon district, and the other part is referred to as the Ofarinkent district [7]."

According to the information provided by Abulkarim as-Sam'ani, Sogarj is a village in the Sogdian region, located five farsakh from Samarkand, within the Ishtikhan region. It is known for being one of the largest, most picturesque villages of Sogd, from which many scholars and imams emerged [8].

The Arab historian Ibn Hawqal also mentions Sogarj, and it is referenced in both *Musaxir al-bilod* and *Baburnama* as Sogarj during the 16th century [9].

In the book *Qandiya*, it is mentioned that the city of Ofarinkent was founded during the invasion of Samarkand by Qutayba: "When Ghorak ruled the area (at the end of the 7th century), he had two brothers, Tarxun and Ofarin. Ofarin was the younger and poorer of the two. Later, Ghorak founded a settlement four farsakh from Samarkand and named it Ofarinkent after his younger brother [10]."

The description of Miyonkol and the surrounding districts also appears in Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur's *Baburnama*, where it is stated: "Samarkand has some fine districts, including the Sugd district, which is connected to the neighboring regions. From its beginning in Yoryayloq to its end in Bukhara, it stretches without interruption. It is famous because it has thirty orchards planted by Temurbek [11]."

The poet Boborahim Mashrab, who lived for a time in Miyonkol, describes it as follows: "If you don't know, let me tell you – Miyonkol! The sweetness of melons and the aroma of grapes grow here. The soil of this valley between the Qoradaryo and Oqdaryo rivers is formed by dust brought from distant mountains and deserts. This area is highly fertile, with many villages and cities [12]."

In the early Middle Ages, as was the case in other regions of Central Asia, urbanization developed in Sugda. Cities, as part of the Sogdian confederation, became administrative centers. One such city, Ishtikhan, located in the Miyonkol region in central Sugda, is recorded in Chinese sources as Sidixen and Sao [13].

The historian A. Vambéry also provides information about Miyonkol, writing: "We left the Qorasuv area and arrived at Dovul. Our path crossed steep ravines, and we could see vast and endless swamps. These forests stretched halfway to Bukhara and served as shelter for the Uzbek-Chinese-Qipchak tribe, who were frequently in conflict with the Amir [14]."

In the 1860s, Russian representative A.S. Tatarinov, who was imprisoned for seven months in Bukhara, described Miyonkol as follows: "On October 28, 1866, we reached a place 42 versts (about 42 km) from Kattakurgan. The ravines on the left of the Miyonkol valley were steep and covered with chalky soil, resembling mountainous valleys. The area near Kattakurgan reminded me of ravines in southern Russian lands [15]."

A. Grebinkin, who conducted research in the Zarafshan valley, describes Miyonkol as follows: "Between the Oqdaryo and Qoradaryo rivers lies an island, an area famous for its agricultural fertility and the culture of irrigation, making it well-known throughout Turkestan. This is the famous Miyonkol valley."

## CONCLUSION

**Fundamental Finding :** The research highlights the significant role of the Miyonkol oasis in the economic, cultural, and strategic life of Samarkand and the entire Zarafshan Valley. The convergence of trade routes, the development of agriculture, and the dense population in this region define its historical importance. Moreover, some sources and literature have indicated that certain cities and settlements outside the Miyonkol region are associated with it. Many Russian researchers describe Miyonkol not only as part of the Zarafshan Valley but also as a geographically favorable, fertile, and agriculturally developed area within the entire Bukhara Khanate. **Implication:** The study reveals that Miyonkol was a crucial geographical area in both Samarkand and the Zarafshan Valley, where trade, agriculture, and a high population density played a central role in the development of the region. It also demonstrates that cultural development in Miyonkol was on par with Samarkand. These findings imply that the oasis was not merely a peripheral area but a dynamic and integral contributor to the historical and socio-economic fabric of Central Asia. **Limitation:** Since the research is primarily based on historical texts, there may be a lack of certain information or gaps in the available data. This limitation suggests that while the findings are insightful, they rely on potentially incomplete or biased documentary sources, which may constrain the full reconstruction

of Miyonkol's historical narrative. **Future Research:** Future studies should include comparative research involving Miyonkol and other regions of Central Asia, incorporating archaeological materials and digital maps of trade routes. This would facilitate a deeper and broader understanding of the oasis. By integrating interdisciplinary approaches and technological tools, upcoming research can address current limitations and uncover new dimensions of Miyonkol's historical and geographical significance.

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