Reading a Historical Andijan Bazaar Price List

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The number is often the least difficult part

Imagine finding a small table headed “prices at markets in the Fergana region.” A column gives a commodity, another a number, and a third an abbreviation for a unit. It looks as though the table should answer a familiar question: *Was food expensive?* But even a correctly copied number does not answer that question until we know what was sold, where, when, and to whom. A quoted price might refer to wholesale delivery rather than a household purchase. An unfamiliar unit might measure weight, volume or a bundle of goods. A district average could conceal differences between individual bazaars. A colonial-era official report might record the categories its administrators needed rather than the categories that local buyers used.

For Andijan, these cautions are especially useful. The city belongs to today's Uzbekistan, but nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century papers can place it in different administrative and commercial geographies. A source may concern *Fergana Oblast*, the Andijan district, a neighbouring town, or several markets at once. Those labels are not interchangeable. Nor can a historical price in rubles be turned into an honest modern tourist budget simply by applying a contemporary exchange-rate calculator.

This guide shows how to annotate a historical price entry without pretending that a catalogue title reveals every number inside a document. It uses **two real bibliographic anchors**: a 1906 archival file concerning prices of bread grains and other agricultural products in markets of Fergana Oblast, and a printed 1904 discussion of the cotton economy that mentions prices in the Asaka bazaar in 1902. Neither source is presented here as a newly transcribed complete Andijan price table. Where a worked example requires invented numbers, it is labelled fictional. [S1, S2]

An actual archival lead: market prices in Fergana Oblast, 1906

The Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library catalogues an archival file entitled, in Russian, **“Ведомости о ценах на хлеба и др. сельскохозяйственные продукты по рынкам Ферганской обл.”** In plain English, that is a set of statements or returns about prices of bread grains and other agricultural products in markets of Fergana Oblast. The catalogue identifies the original file under the Russian State Historical Archive, **RGIA 23/9/509**, dates the file to **1 March–17 August 1906**, describes it as five leaves, and identifies Russian as the recorded language. These are facts about the *catalogued file*. They do not by themselves identify every market named inside, each commodity, its unit, or any actual price observation. [S1]

That distinction gives us a productive starting point. If you have only a catalogue record, the sound description is: “A 1906 archival file records agricultural market-price information for Fergana Oblast.” You should not write: “Andijan wheat sold for [number] in [month],” unless you have inspected a relevant original entry or dependable transcription naming Andijan and the unit. The regional title makes the file worth investigating; it does not authorize town-specific numerical claims.

The archive signature matters. A filename downloaded from a web page may change. An accession or fond/opis/delo reference helps a researcher locate the actual archival object or request a reliable reproduction. The expression **RGIA 23/9/509** is an archival locator, not a price, date or market code. Keep it separate from the observation fields in your data sheet.

A later digitized copy, if obtained, should be checked for missing pages, trimmed margins, handwriting, printed headings and later annotations. A catalogue that says “five leaves” does not guarantee that a low-resolution thumbnail displays each face. Before working with prices, write down what was actually consulted: catalogue description, scan, microfilm, publication or a transcription made by another scholar. This one small habit prevents a surprising number of historical errors.

A second source: a named bazaar in a contemporary printed argument

S. A. Melik-Sarkisian's 1904 work on cotton production in Fergana discusses the regional economy, transport, prices and agricultural choices. Its historical Russian text mentions the **Asaka bazaar** on **9 April 1902** in connection with unusually high prices of dried lucerne (alfalfa). This is a meaningful named-market lead, but it comes from a discussion that argues about economic conditions and policy. It is not a neutral spreadsheet for Andijan's entire urban market. The geographic reference and the author’s interpretation need to be separated. [S2]

There is also a transcription problem. The older printed passage uses historical Russian spelling and a price expressed in terms of “a hundred,” while the precise counted object needs examination in a dependable facsimile and, where necessary, specialist linguistic verification. A reader should resist confidently translating that measure into kilograms, bundles or individual animals without seeing the surrounding context. **This article does not repeat the numerical quotation as a verified modern-unit price.** Instead it uses the example to show why the original commodity definition and unit are just as important as the number.

Asaka is not simply a second name for an Andijan city bazaar. Its administrative attribution in a 1902 text must be read in the document's own period, not overwritten with a modern map label. A writer researching Andijan's wider economic context may reasonably discuss it as regional evidence, but must not silently relabel an Asaka observation as a transaction made inside Andijan city.

The sources therefore establish different kinds of knowledge. The 1906 archive catalogue shows the existence, scope and dates of a file of agricultural market-price returns for Fergana Oblast. The 1904 printed work offers a period author's discussion of the agricultural economy with one named Asaka bazaar example. Neither alone gives a validated, comprehensive, comparable series for Andijan city. That limitation should be part of the article's conclusion rather than concealed in a footnote.

Build a price entry from the outside inward

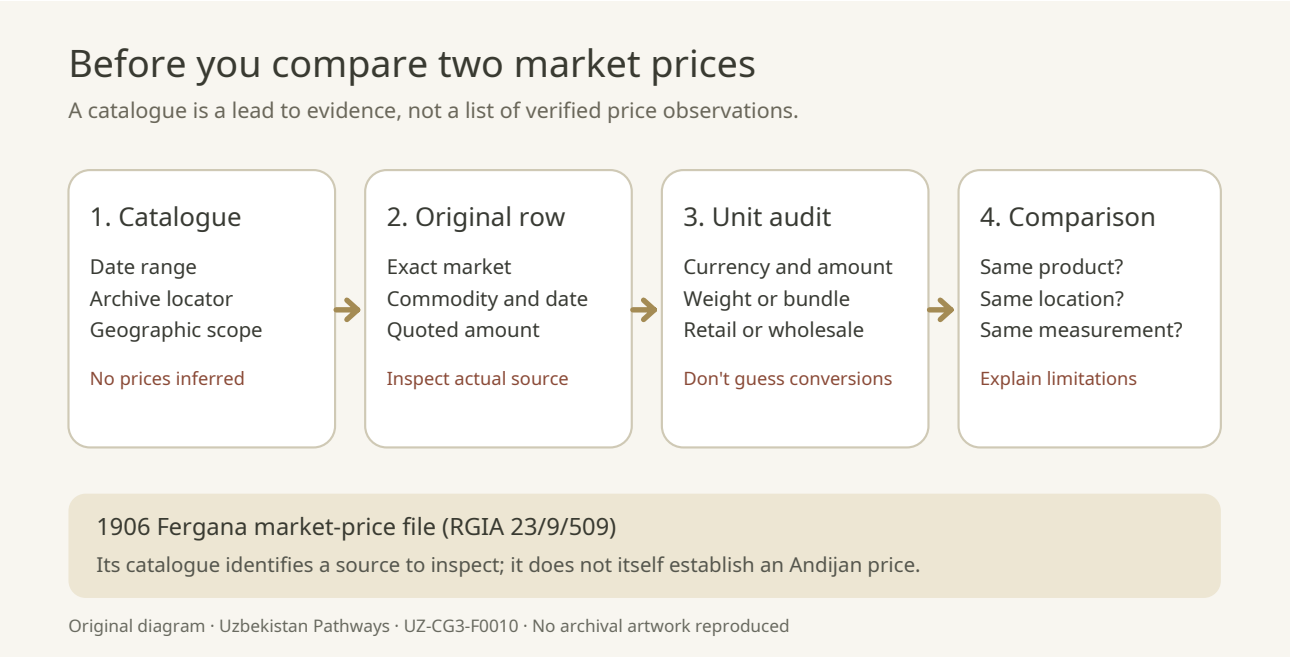
A defensible historical-price record should have more fields than commodity and amount. At minimum, record the following in separate columns: **source identifier, document date, observation date, market, administrative geography as written, commodity name in the original language, commodity quality or grade, currency, monetary amount, physical unit, sale context, transcriber/translator, image or page reference, and uncertainty**.

Why so many? Consider the difference between the day a ministry compiled a return and the day a local market observer recorded a price. A retrospective report filed in August may reproduce prices from March. Without distinct dates, a dataset can appear to document August conditions that it never measured. The original place name is equally important. One Russian-era administrative label might cover multiple markets; a modern district boundary may not match the historical area. A neatly standardized location field can make the error harder to notice.

Commodity names are not safe to simplify either. “Grain” could refer to wheat, barley, rice or another food. Different milling or moisture conditions affect weight and use. A bulk price per unit of weight and a retail price for a small package are not directly comparable. Even a familiar word like “cotton” may refer

to seed cotton, cleaned fibre or a product at a different processing stage. A historical price can look implausibly low simply because the analyst has compared two different things.

Currency poses two distinct questions. First, which monetary unit is actually specified in the source? Second, what historical economic comparison, if any, is justified? A price written in Russian imperial rubles cannot simply be converted into modern Uzbek som or US dollars to reconstruct purchasing power. Monetary regimes, wages, taxes, the commodity basket, market access and inflation differ. Even a carefully calculated historical price index requires a legitimate historical comparison series. This FREE guide does **not** provide a present-day currency equivalent, because that would suggest precision that the underlying evidence does not support.



Original evidence-flow diagram. Illustrative stages only; no archival price table or facsimile is reproduced.

Annotated worksheet: a fictional exercise, not an archival transcription

Below is an entirely **fictional practice entry**. The figures and locations are educational placeholders; they do not appear as verified Andijan prices in the cited 1906 file or in the 1904 book. The purpose is to teach the logic of annotation.

Field	Fictional practice entry	What to verify in a real record
Market	“Market A, Fergana region”	Does a town or bazaar actually appear on the page?
Observation date	10 May, invented year	Does the original line give a day, reporting month or compilation date?
Commodity	“Grain type X”	Exact historic-language name, grade and processing stage
Price	“12 units”	Original numerals, currency sign, copied arithmetic

Field	Fictional practice entry	What to verify in a real record
Quantity unit	“one basket”	Capacity/weight of the basket; whether basket size was standardized
Transaction type	“Retail”	Was the quotation actually retail, wholesale or procurement?
Source	“Fictional worksheet only”	Archive reference, inventory, folio/page and image
Confidence	“No historic price claim”	Can every field be independently traced?

A student can see why an apparently clear price of “12” is almost content-free. Twelve *what*? For how much grain? Which grade? On what date? Did the seller deliver to a central buyer or sell directly to a household? Was the recorded number a single observed transaction, a reported range, or an administrative estimate? A useful data table does not hide these questions. It gives them visible columns.

Try rewriting the invented row as a historical claim. “Grain cost 12 in Fergana” is unsound. “The fictional worksheet contains a price of 12 invented units for an invented basket of grain” is accurate but has no historical significance. The lesson is that a polished statement cannot compensate for absent source evidence. Only a verifiable real record can turn the field into a historical observation.

Two records are not automatically a trend

Suppose a researcher later finds two authentic market returns, one for spring and another for autumn. The first gives a number, and the second is higher. Is that enough to say prices rose in Andijan? Not yet. The comparison must answer whether the same market, commodity, grade, unit, currency and transaction type were used. It also needs to know whether the reporting offices measured the same kind of thing. A single institutional change in how prices were collected can produce an apparent “jump” that has more to do with paperwork than with daily life.

The calendar requires special care. A file titled “prices in 1906” may contain several dated observations and perhaps later office annotations. If you group everything under 1906 without month, you may erase seasonal differences. If a document contains a calendar notation that you do not understand, record it as given and consult qualified reference material before conversion. Do not silently assign a modern date from a rough visual guess.

Price comparisons can still be illuminating. A verified sequence, consistently defined, may help investigate food availability, irrigation, transport or market integration. But the causal explanation is another step. A railway may have changed shipping costs while other factors changed harvests and demand. An earthquake may have disrupted one town without explaining every regional agricultural price. A contemporary pamphlet may attribute a change to the policy its author wanted to promote. To prove a mechanism, compare the price data with independent, dated evidence of the relevant events and acknowledge alternatives.

Read official statistics as institutional speech

The 1906 archival file was generated within the structures of the Russian Empire. Such returns often served administrative purposes. That does not mean a statistic is inherently false; it means the question “Who needed this number?” belongs beside “What is the number?” An office might seek information about grain supply, commercial activity or transport. Its reporting system could privilege easily observed markets or merchants known to officials. Transactions outside that system might not appear.

The 1904 cotton-economy book is a different genre with a different perspective: a printed argument about regional agriculture and commercial relations, rather than an internal set of price statements. Its author may present selected examples to explain or advocate a position. That makes it an important historical source for contemporary reasoning, but it is not a substitute for original market returns. Comparing the two genres can reveal disagreement or complementary evidence, so long as the writer does not treat either one as a complete voice of farmers, traders and buyers.

The vocabulary used for people in older documents can be objectionable, imprecise or misleading by today's standards. If a historical administrative category is essential to a study, quote or translate it with context and explain why it appeared in the source. Do not casually reproduce a colonial classification as a neutral present-day description of Andijan's people. Nor should modern identities be inferred automatically from a nineteenth-century locality or language label.

What a good caption does

An honest caption for an eventual documentary illustration might read: “Catalogue entry for a Russian-language archival file on prices of agricultural products at Fergana Oblast markets, with documents dated March–August 1906; RGIA 23/9/509. The present article has not transcribed the underlying five-leaf file.” That caption explains exactly what the reader can check and what remains undone. It also avoids displaying an unlicensed scan, claiming prices not examined, or treating a catalogue card as if it were the market itself.

If the original document later becomes available for publication, use a crop only with appropriate rights and archive credit. State when a figure shows a modern transcription rather than the original handwriting. Alt text should explain the visible structure—handwritten or printed headings, ruled columns, monetary notation—without guessing illegible figures. The illustrative evidence-flow diagram prepared for this article is original and contains no reproduction of archival pages.

A useful visual could show four nested frames: **catalogue**, **document**, **price row**, **interpretation**. Moving from one frame to the next requires a source check. A map may show that Andijan and Asaka belong to the broader Fergana Valley today, but should not claim that historic market observations were gathered within current administrative boundaries. A pinpoint on a map is not evidence of the archival price.

A practical five-minute investigation

Open the official catalogue page for the 1906 file. First, copy the title, date span and RGIA reference. Next, write a sentence about what that metadata alone establishes. Then list five pieces of information you still need: names of the markets, commodity rows, units, exact dates, and whether figures represent observed sales or reports. If you are able to access a scan, add its exact folio identifiers and note legibility rather than assuming all fields are clear. If you cannot access it, stop there—do not compensate by making up a plausible table.

Now look at the 1904 cotton-economy discussion. Identify the author's purpose, the date of publication, and the specific earlier market event being mentioned. Ask what might change when a 1902 example is used in a 1904 argument. Could a selected example be unusually high rather than typical? Is the unit

explained? Does the period geography match the modern place name you intend to use? Even without producing a single numerical comparison, you will have learned to distinguish an archival return from a published interpretation.

Finally, formulate the strongest supportable conclusion: **historical price evidence for the wider Fergana economy exists, but a specific numerical claim about an Andijan bazaar must be tied to an identified, legible and correctly interpreted observation.** That conclusion is more useful than a fabricated series. It tells the next reader where to investigate, which fields to record and what not to claim in advance.

Keep the comparison honest

A historical market price is not merely a number in an old currency. It is an observation made at a particular moment, in a particular place, under a particular measurement convention, for a particular institutional purpose. The most responsible way to work with such a record is to preserve those conditions. The first question is not “How much would that cost today?” but “What exactly did this document mean by this price?”

For Andijan, the best starting points found for this lesson are evidence leads, not a fully reconstructed bazaar database: the 1906 Fergana Oblast archival file and the 1904 printed discussion with its Asaka reference. They are enough to teach disciplined method while leaving real research questions open. A reader who walks away knowing how to annotate the original date, location, unit and quotation context has gained a skill that can be reused for other places, commodities and centuries.

Sources and documentation

[S1] Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library, catalogue record: “Ведомости о ценах на хлеба и др. сельскохозяйственные продукты по рынкам Ферганской обл.” (Statements of prices of bread grains and other agricultural products at markets in Fergana Oblast). Dates 1 March–17 August 1906; Russian State Historical Archive RGIA 23/9/509; five leaves; Russian language; descriptions of typed and handwritten material. https://www.prlib.ru/node/322896 (catalogue consulted 2 November 2026). **Limit:** the archival file itself has not been transcribed in this article; its catalogue does not supply named Andijan market rows or numerical observations.

[S2] S. A. Melik-Sarkisian, 1904, Хлопковое дело въ Ферганской области и меры къ его упорядоченію (Cotton production in Fergana Oblast and measures for its regulation). Historical Russian-language printed discussion of agriculture, transport and commerce, including an Asaka bazaar observation dated 9 April 1902. https://djvu.online/file/eyETeoDE2TEM4 (consulted 2 November 2026). **Limit:** the exact unit and historic spelling require facsimile confirmation before any modern-unit price calculation; this article quotes no numeric price as verified. The book's arguments are the author's contemporary interpretations.

[S3] Uzbekistan national tourism portal, Andijan Region overview. Geographic context only, not archival price evidence. https://uzbekistan.travel/en/r/andijan-region/ (access checked 2 November 2026).