

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF TASHKENT, SAMARKAND, AND BUKHARA IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES: URBANISM, DUAL-CITY FORMATION, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF TRADE NETWORKS

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Abstract. *This article examines the socio-cultural transformation of three major Central Asian cities Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with particular focus on the period of Russian colonial rule and the early Soviet era. Drawing upon Uzbek, Russian, and Western historiographic sources, the study analyzes three interrelated processes: (1) the imposition of European urban planning models under Russian colonial administration and the consequent emergence of dual-city structures; (2) the formation and spatial dynamics of the eski shahar (old city) and yangi shahar (new city) as distinct yet interacting urban zones; and (3) the transformation of traditional trade networks, bazaars, and the mahalla system under the pressures of colonialism and modernization. The findings reveal that while Russian colonial urbanism fundamentally altered the physical and social geography of these cities, indigenous urban institutions particularly the mahalla and the bazaar demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, serving as repositories of local identity and social cohesion throughout successive waves of transformation.*

Keywords: *Central Asian urbanism, Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Russian colonialism, dual-city structure, mahalla, bazaar, socio-cultural transformation, Soviet modernization.*

INTRODUCTION

The cities of Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara occupy a singular position in the urban history of the Islamic world and Central Asia. For centuries, they served as major nodes in the transcontinental Silk Road trade network, centers of Islamic learning and culture, and seats of political power for successive Turkic and Persian dynasties. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, these cities stood at the threshold of a profound transformation as the Russian Empire expanded southward into Central Asia, inaugurating

a colonial era that would fundamentally reshape their physical form, social structures, and cultural life.

The Russian conquest of Central Asia Tashkent fell in 1865, Samarkand in 1868, and the Bukharan Emirate became a protectorate the same year initiated an era of unprecedented urban change. As Khalid (2007:46) has argued, the colonial encounter in Central Asia was not merely a political event but a spatial and cultural revolution that reordered the very fabric of urban life. The establishment of the Governorate-General of Turkestan in 1867 created an administrative framework through which European models of urban planning, sanitation, and governance were imposed upon existing Islamic cities.

The objective of this study is to provide a comparative analysis of the socio-cultural transformation of Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, examining three interconnected dimensions: colonial urban planning and its physical legacy; the formation and interaction of old and new city zones; and the evolution of trade networks, bazaars, and mahalla communities under colonial and early Soviet pressures. The study addresses the following research questions: (1) How did Russian colonial urban planning reshape the physical structure of these three cities, and what common patterns and city-specific variations emerged? (2) How did the old city and new city zones interact, and what were the social and cultural consequences of this spatial duality? (3) How did traditional commercial institutions bazaars, caravansarais, and trade guilds adapt to or resist the transformations brought by colonialism and modernization?

MAIN PART

This study employs a comparative-historical methodology combining archival analysis, historiographic synthesis, and spatial-analytical approaches. The comparative framework examines the three cities Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara as parallel cases of colonial urban transformation, identifying both common patterns and city-specific variations.

The source base encompasses four categories. First, primary archival and documentary sources: the study draws upon published archival collections, including Russian colonial administrative records, statistical surveys of the Turkestan Governorate-General, city maps and plans from the colonial period, and reports by Russian military engineers and administrators. Of particular importance are the materials published by the Turkestan

Section of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society and the statistical compilations produced by colonial administrators (Greibenkin, 1872; Dobrosmyslov, 1912).

The analytical approach combines chronological narrative with thematic analysis organized around the three research dimensions: urban planning, dual-city formation, and commercial transformation. For each city, the study traces the trajectory of change from the pre-colonial period through the Russian imperial era and into the early Soviet period (approximately 1860s–1930s), while the comparative framework identifies cross-cutting patterns and divergences among the three cases.

Colonial Urban Planning and Physical Transformation

Tashkent's conquest in 1865 and its subsequent designation as the capital of the Turkestan Governorate-General in 1867 made it the primary laboratory for Russian colonial urban planning in Central Asia. The pre-colonial city was a densely built Islamic urban center organized around the Chorsu bazaar complex, the Kukeldash madrasa, and a network of approximately 150 mahallas (Abduraimov, 1966:112). The city was irrigated by the Bozsu Canal and its tributaries, which shaped the urban layout and provided water for both domestic and agricultural use.

General Mikhail Cherniaev, having captured the city, initially established a military cantonment outside the old city walls. However, the appointment of Kaufman as the first Governor-General in 1867 marked the beginning of systematic colonial urban development. Kaufman commissioned Russian military engineers to design a new European-style city to the south and east of the old city, separated from it by the Ankhor Canal (Lun'yova, 1985:34). The new city was laid out on a grid plan with broad, tree-lined boulevards, public gardens, administrative buildings, Orthodox churches, and European-style residential quarters a stark contrast to the organic, labyrinthine street network of the old city.

By the 1890s, the new city had developed a recognizable European character. The introduction of the Trans-Caspian Railway in 1888 and its extension to Tashkent in 1898 further accelerated the city's transformation, creating a modern transportation hub alongside the traditional caravan routes. Dobrosmyslov (1912:78) recorded that by the early twentieth century, the new city contained administrative headquarters, military barracks, a hospital, schools, a theater, and European-style commercial establishments, while the old city retained its mosques, madrasas, bazaars, and mahalla structure largely intact.

Sahadeo (2007:45) emphasizes that the Tashkent dual city was characterized by an asymmetry of resources and power. Colonial administration invested heavily in the infrastructure of the new city while largely neglecting the old city, creating visible disparities in road quality, sanitation, lighting, and public services. Yet the old city remained the demographic center of gravity: as late as 1910, approximately 150,000 of the city's 200,000 inhabitants lived in the old city (Dobrosmyslov, 1912:95).

Samarkand's capture in 1868 presented the Russian administration with a different urban challenge. Unlike Tashkent, Samarkand possessed a monumental architectural heritage of global significance the Registan ensemble, the Bibi-Khanym mosque, the Shah-i-Zinda necropolis, and numerous other Timurid-era structures. The pre-colonial city was organized around these monuments, with mahallas clustered in the spaces between and around them (Sultonov, 2009:67).

Russian colonial planners established the new city to the west of the old city, in the area around the former citadel (Ark). Morrison (2008:156) documents that the new Samarkand was designed with wider streets and a more regular layout than the old city, but on a smaller scale than Tashkent's new city, reflecting Samarkand's secondary administrative status. The construction of the railway station in 1888 anchored the new city's development, creating a commercial and transportation axis that complemented and gradually competed with the old city's traditional bazaar economy.

A distinctive feature of Samarkand's colonial transformation was the Russian administration's ambivalent relationship with the city's monumental heritage. On one hand, colonial authorities commissioned surveys and restoration projects for major Timurid monuments, motivated by a combination of scholarly interest and imperial prestige. On the other hand, as Nil'sen (1988:145) documents, the construction of the new city involved the destruction of significant portions of the old city's residential fabric, particularly in the area between the Registan and the citadel. Sultonov (2009:89) estimates that approximately one-third of the old city's built area was demolished or significantly altered during the first four decades of Russian rule.

Bukhara's trajectory differed fundamentally from those of Tashkent and Samarkand because it retained nominal political autonomy as a Russian protectorate until 1920. The Bukharan Emirate, while subject to Russian economic and military influence,

maintained its own administration, legal system, and urban governance structures. This political arrangement had profound consequences for Bukhara's urban development: unlike Tashkent and Samarkand, Bukhara did not experience the construction of a large European new city during the imperial period (Gangler, 2006:34).

Russian presence in Bukhara was concentrated in Kagan (New Bukhara), a settlement established 12 kilometers from the old city at the railway junction. Kagan served as the Russian administrative and commercial outpost but remained physically and socially separate from Bukhara proper. Toshpo'latov (2015:56) argues that this physical separation meant that Bukhara's old city preserved its pre-colonial urban form more completely than either Tashkent or Samarkand. The city's dense network of approximately 200 mahallas, its extensive bazaar system centered on the covered tim and toqi trading domes, and its religious educational institutions (approximately 100 madrasas) remained largely intact through the imperial period.

However, the establishment of Kagan as a railway town introduced new economic dynamics. Bartol'd (1963:238) noted that Kagan rapidly became a conduit for Russian manufactured goods entering the Bukharan market, while the traditional caravan trade routes that had sustained Bukhara's commercial prominence gradually declined in importance. This economic reorientation, though less visually dramatic than the physical transformation of Tashkent, had profound long-term consequences for Bukhara's commercial ecology.

The formation of dual-city structures in Tashkent and Samarkand created a distinctive urban geography in which two fundamentally different spatial systems coexisted in close proximity. The eski shahar was characterized by narrow, winding streets, courtyard houses oriented inward, neighborhood mosques, communal water channels, and dense residential fabric organized around the mahalla unit. The yangi shahar featured wide, straight boulevards, outward-facing European-style buildings, public parks, and Western-style commercial establishments (Lun'yova, 1985:67).

In Tashkent, the Ankhor Canal served as the primary boundary between old and new cities. Khalid (2007:58) describes this boundary as simultaneously physical, social, and symbolic: it demarcated not only two different urban forms but two different social worlds, each with its own languages, customs, dress codes, and daily rhythms. Yet the boundary was permeable. Sahadeo (2007:78) documents extensive daily movement

across the old-new city divide: indigenous merchants traveled to the new city to sell goods in European-style shops, while Russian residents frequented the old city's bazaars for their exotic atmosphere and lower prices.

In Samarkand, the dual-city boundary was less sharply defined. Morrison (2008:189) notes that the new city's construction directly abutted and partially overlapped with old city neighborhoods, creating zones of mixed habitation and interaction. The Registan square, located at the junction of old and new cities, became a particularly significant contact zone where indigenous and colonial populations encountered each other in a shared public space.

The social consequences of dual-city formation were complex and multivalent. On one hand, the spatial segregation reinforced and institutionalized ethnic and cultural boundaries. The old city remained overwhelmingly Uzbek and Tajik in population, while the new city was predominantly Russian and European. Separate municipal administrations governed the two zones, with starkly unequal resource allocation (Sahadeo, 2007:52). On the other hand, the proximity of two urban systems created opportunities for cultural exchange, economic complementarity, and the emergence of a bilingual, bicultural intermediary class primarily indigenous merchants and professionals who operated in both worlds.

Abduraimov (1966:198) identifies the emergence of what he terms *yangi ziyolilar* (new intellectuals) a group of reform-minded Central Asians who, while rooted in the old city's cultural traditions, engaged with Russian and European ideas through education, journalism, and commerce. The Jadidist movement, which advocated educational and social reform in the early twentieth century, was closely associated with this intermediary social stratum and drew much of its energy from the cultural tensions generated by the dual-city experience (Khalid, 2007:94).

Trade, Bazaars, and the Mahalla: Continuity and Transformation

The bazaar (bozor) was the economic heart of the pre-colonial Central Asian city. In Tashkent, the Chorsu bazaar complex was the city's largest and most important market, serving as the central node in a network of smaller neighborhood bazaars distributed throughout the mahallas (Qodirov, 2008:45). In Samarkand, the Siyob bazaar performed a similar function, while Bukhara's commercial infrastructure was uniquely elaborate, featuring multiple covered trading domes (toqi) including the Toqi-Sarrofon

(moneychangers' dome), Toqi-Telpakfurushon (capmakers' dome), and Toqi-Zargaron (jewelers' dome) as well as numerous caravansarais serving long-distance merchants (Gangler, 2006:112).

The Russian colonial impact on these commercial systems was multifaceted. The most immediate effect was the integration of Central Asian markets into the Russian imperial economy. The construction of the Trans-Caspian Railway (1880s–1890s) dramatically reduced transportation costs and times, enabling the mass importation of Russian manufactured goods particularly textiles, metalware, kerosene, and sugar that competed with and often displaced local artisanal production (Bartol'd, 1963:245). Simultaneously, the railway facilitated the export of Central Asian raw materials, particularly cotton, which became the region's dominant cash crop under Russian encouragement.

Qodirov (2008:78) documents the structural transformation of the bazaar economy in three phases. In the first phase (1865–1885), traditional bazaar structures and trade practices remained largely intact, with Russian goods entering existing commercial networks. In the second phase (1885–1905), the railway's arrival accelerated commercial reorientation: new Russian-style shops (magazin) appeared in the new cities, and some indigenous merchants began adopting European commercial practices, including fixed pricing, advertising, and bookkeeping. In the third phase (1905–1917), the traditional bazaar economy experienced significant contraction as industrial goods displaced artisanal products and as the new city's commercial establishments captured an increasing share of high-value trade.

Despite these pressures, the bazaar proved remarkably resilient. Sukhareva (1966:134) observed that Bukhara's bazaar system maintained its commercial vitality through the entire colonial period, partly because the city's protectorate status shielded it from the most aggressive forms of colonial commercial penetration, and partly because the bazaar served social and cultural functions that European-style shops could not replicate. The bazaar was not merely a place of exchange but a space of sociability, news circulation, dispute resolution, and community identity (Ahmedov, 2003:67).

The Mahalla: Social Resilience and Adaptation

The mahalla represented the fundamental unit of social organization in pre-colonial Central Asian cities. Suxareva (1962:56), based on extensive fieldwork in the 1940s and

1950s when many colonial-era patterns were still discernible described the mahalla as a semi-autonomous community bound by ties of neighborhood, kinship, occupation, and shared ritual practice. Each mahalla typically possessed its own mosque, often a small bazaar or cluster of artisan workshops, a communal pool or bathhouse (hammom), and a recognized leader (oqsoqol or ming boshi) who mediated disputes, organized communal labor, and represented the community to external authorities.

Toshpo'latov (2015:89) provides detailed analysis of the mahalla system's evolution in Bukhara, identifying several key adaptations. First, the mahalla absorbed new economic functions as traditional guild structures weakened: neighborhood-based commercial networks partially replaced occupation-based guilds as the primary framework for economic cooperation. Second, the mahalla became an increasingly important site of cultural preservation, with communal rituals, oral traditions, and craft knowledge maintained through neighborhood institutions even as the broader political and economic landscape shifted dramatically.

The mahalla's communal practices particularly the hashar (collective labor), gap (regular social gathering), and life-cycle ceremonies (weddings, circumcision feasts, funerals) continued to structure social life in the old cities throughout the colonial and early Soviet periods. Abduraimov (1966:234) notes that these practices served as mechanisms of social solidarity that helped old-city communities navigate the disruptions of colonial rule, economic transformation, and, eventually, the revolutionary upheavals of 1917–1924.

Patterns of Colonial Urbanism

The comparative analysis reveals both common patterns and significant variations in the colonial transformation of the three cities. The most striking common pattern is the imposition of spatial dualism the creation of two parallel urban systems within a single metropolitan area. This pattern was not unique to Central Asia; it characterized colonial cities across Asia and North Africa, from Delhi to Algiers (King, 1976:45). However, the Central Asian variant possessed distinctive features: the old cities were not destroyed or abandoned but continued to function as vibrant, densely populated urban zones, and the indigenous population was not forcibly relocated but rather contained within existing boundaries.

The key variable differentiating the three cases was the degree of Russian political control. Tashkent, as the colonial capital under direct Russian administration, experienced the most intensive colonial urban development. Samarkand, also under direct rule but of secondary administrative importance, underwent significant but less comprehensive transformation. Bukhara, as a protectorate, preserved its pre-colonial urban form most completely. This gradient from maximum colonial intervention in Tashkent to minimum intervention in Bukhara confirms Morrison's (2008:45) argument that the specific modalities of colonial governance, not simply the fact of colonial rule, determined the pace and extent of urban transformation.

The Resilience of Indigenous Urban Institutions

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study is the remarkable resilience of the mahalla and bazaar systems under colonial pressures. Rather than being destroyed or marginalized by colonial rule, these institutions adapted and, in some respects, were strengthened by the challenges they faced. The mahalla's survival can be attributed to several factors: its multifunctionality (serving social, economic, religious, and governance functions simultaneously); its spatial rootedness in the physical fabric of the old city; and the colonial administration's pragmatic decision to co-opt rather than dismantle it (Khalid, 2007:64).

The bazaar's resilience, while more qualified, is equally noteworthy. Despite significant economic displacement caused by Russian manufactured goods and the railway's reorientation of trade flows, the bazaar survived because it served irreplaceable social functions. As Suxareva (1962:134) observed, the bazaar was embedded in a web of social relationships credit networks, patron-client ties, neighborhood solidarities that European-style commercial establishments could not replicate. Qodirov (2008:112) adds that the bazaar's spatial organization, which clustered related trades in adjacent stalls and organized artisans by mahalla affiliation, created economic efficiencies rooted in social trust rather than in formal institutional mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the socio-cultural transformation of Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, revealing a complex process

of change in which colonial imposition, indigenous adaptation, and institutional resilience interacted to produce distinctive urban outcomes.

These findings carry implications for broader debates in colonial urban history, urban resilience studies, and Central Asian historiography. They suggest that the narrative of colonial urbanism as a unidirectional process of Western imposition upon passive indigenous societies is inadequate. Instead, the Central Asian experience reveals a dynamic process of negotiation, adaptation, and selective appropriation in which indigenous urban institutions played active roles in shaping the outcomes of colonial encounter. Future research should extend this analysis to include the late Soviet and post-independence periods, as well as other Central Asian cities, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term trajectories of urban transformation in the region.

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