

Historical Study of the City Bukhara and its Diverse Culture and Storehouse of Religious and Philosophical Knowledge

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Abstract

Bukhara, a historical city in Uzbekistan, Central Asia, has been a significant hub of human civilization for more than 2,500 years. This study reveals Bukhara's diverse and intricate importance, emphasizing its exceptional role as a nexus for various cultures and religions. Throughout several centuries, the city has functioned as a significant nexus where many distinct civilizations have converged, engendering a multifaceted and dynamic cultural fabric. This article examines the impact of Bukhara's advantageous geographical position along the Silk Road on facilitating intellectual, religious, and artistic interchange, accumulating a vast reservoir of theological and philosophical wisdom. The objectives of this project encompass more than just historical documentation. The goals include safeguarding Bukhara's cultural heritage, advancing interfaith and intercultural tolerance, and exploring the philosophical contributions of esteemed academics such as Avicenna and Al-Biruni. This study examines the historical progression of the city, tracing its roots from ancient times to the Islamic Golden Age, the period of Mongol governance, and the subsequent effect of the Russian empire. The analysis underscores the lasting impact of each era on the cultural and societal tapestry of Bukhara. In conclusion, Bukhara is a manifestation of the resilient human inclination towards exploration and is evidence of the significant influence of cultural heterogeneity on the trajectory of historical development.

Keywords: *Bukhara, Diversity, Culture, Religious knowledge, Philosophical Knowledge*

Introduction:

Bukhara, located in the contemporary territory of Uzbekistan, serves as a testimony to the everlasting resilience of human civilization. The history of this place is a comprehensive account of several empires, religious beliefs, and philosophical ideologies that have

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intersected and flourished within its time-honoured boundaries. The examination of Bukhara holds significant importance in appreciating Central Asia's historical context and gaining a comprehensive picture of the broader progression of human civilization.²

The historical origins of Bukhara can be traced back to a period spanning more than two thousand years. Established in the 6th century BCE, the city held significant prominence as a pivotal hub along the renowned Silk Road, facilitating crucial connections between the Eastern and Western regions.³ Throughout history, the area in question has witnessed the dominion of several powers, including but not limited to the Achaemenids, Alexander the Great, the Sassanids, the Arabs, the Mongols, and the Timurids. Each of these civilisations has impacted the city, influenced its culture and defined its identity.⁴

Objectives and Significance of the Study

The numerous purposes and significances of studying the history and culture of Bukhara include:

- The preservation of cultural assets is contingent upon a comprehensive understanding of Bukhara's historical background, which is vital for safeguarding its abundant cultural legacy. Preserving historical landmarks, written documents, and cultural traditions is crucial to ensure their protection and longevity.
- The historical context of Bukhara serves as a notable illustration of the harmonious cohabitation between diverse religious and cultural communities, thereby promoting the value of tolerance. Examining this subject matter can cultivate an environment of mutual acceptance and understanding among individuals from different religious and cultural backgrounds.
- Examining the philosophical contributions made by intellectuals from Bukhara offers valuable insights into the progression of human thought and the advancement of scientific and philosophical concepts.
- The historical value of Bukhara can significantly benefit the tourism business. Utilizing knowledge gained from the city's historical context can assist in formulating economic policies and plans for development.

². Gangler, A., Gaube, H., & Petruccioli, A. (2004). *Bukhara, the eastern dome of Islam: Urban development, urban space, architecture and population*: Edition Axel Menges, p 152

³. Lawton, J. (1991). *Samarkand and Bukhara*, p.43

⁴. Frank, A. J. (2012). *Bukhara and the Muslims of Russia: Sufism, education and the paradox of Islamic prestige* (Vol. 26): Brill.

Bukhara: A Land of Cultural Heritage

The Historic Centre of Bukhara, located along the ancient trade routes known as the Silk Roads, boasts a rich history spanning over two millennia. This city stands as a prominent illustration of the remarkably maintained Islamic urban centres in Central Asia over the period spanning from the 10th to the 17th centuries, exhibiting a highly complete urban structure.⁵

Bukhara has historically served as a significant hub for economic and cultural activities throughout the Central Asian region. The ancient city of Persia had a substantial role as a prominent hub of Islamic culture across numerous years, ultimately evolving into a significant cultural centre within the Caliphate around the 8th century.⁶

Except for a few key relics dating back to before the Mongol invasions led by Genghis Khan in 1220 and Temur in 1370, the town's urban development and architectural style can be traced back to the beginning of the Sheibani era of Uzbek governance in the early 16th century. The citadel, rebuilt in the 16th century, has been the town's central government building.⁷

The renowned Ismail Samanai tomb stands out for its understated elegance and is the best example of 10th-century architectural prowess in the larger Muslim world. It is one of the notable architectural structures that have persisted since antiquity. The Poi-Kalyan minaret, dating back to the 11th-century Karakhanid dynasty, is a remarkable example of brick ornamentation.⁸ The Magoki Attori mosque and the Chashma Ayub shrine were also primarily built in the same period. The Ulugbek medresseh stands as a notable architectural testament to the Temurid dynasty. The emergence of the Sheibanids marked the introduction of some highly acclaimed architectural structures in Bukhara.⁹ These include the Poi-Kalyan group, the Lyabi-Khauz ensemble, the Kosh Medresseh, and the Gaukushon medresseh within the Hodja-Kalon ensemble. Subsequent architectural designs from this particular era in Bukhara's historical development encompass grandiose medressehs strategically situated at significant intersections, namely Taki Sarafon (also

⁵. Solov'ev, L. V. (1956). *Adventures in Bukhara*: Lawrence & Wishart, p.65

⁶. Rante, R., Schwarz, F., & Tronca, L. (2022). *The Oasis of Bukhara, Volume 2: An Archaeological, Sociological and Historical Study* (Vol. 17): Brill.

⁷. Rante, R. (2019). *The Oasis of Bukhara, Volume 1: Population, depopulation and settlement evolution* (Vol. 12): Brill

⁸. Bregel, Y. (2000). *The Administration of Bukhara under the Manghiits and some Tashkent manuscripts*, p. 118

⁹. Khan, M. F. (1991). *Tarikh-i-manazili-Bukhara*: Centre of Central Asian Studies, p.126

known as the Dome of the Moneychangers), Taki-Tilpak-Furushan (often referred to as the Dome of the Headguard Sellers), Tim-Bazzazan, and Tiro-Abdullah-Khan.¹⁰ In the early 17th century, builders constructed notable architectural structures in the region, including the Magoki Kurns, a grand mosque they built in 1637, and the impressive Abdullaziz-Khan medresseh, completed in 1652.¹¹

Nevertheless, the true Significance of Bukhara does not solely reside in its structures but rather in its comprehensive urban landscape, which showcases the remarkable and enduring standards of urban planning and architecture that originated during the reign of the Sheibanid dynasty. Bukhara's urban arrangement and architectural structures significantly impacted the development and design of settlements across a vast expanse of Central Asia. Bukhara stands as a prime exemplar of an intact and unadulterated medieval Central Asian municipality, having successfully conserved its urban structure up until the present era.¹² During the period spanning from the 9th to the 16th centuries, Bukhara emerged as a prominent hub for Muslim theological studies, specifically focusing on Sufism, within the Near East region. This city boasted impressive religious institutions, including over two hundred mosques and a hundred madrasahs.¹³

The Philosophical Significance of Bukhara City: A Nexus of Intellectual Excellence:

Bukhara, a city situated along the historic Silk Road, holds a revered position in the records of philosophical history. Throughout history, this region has served as a hub for a wide range of intellectual influences, facilitating the development of philosophical ideas by renowned figures such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Al-Biruni, and Alisher Navoi. The philosophical relevance of the city is diverse since it encompasses several contributions to metaphysics, epistemology, astronomy, and literature.¹⁴

Ibn Sina, often known as Avicenna, and His Exploration of Metaphysical Inquiries:

Ibn Sina, a prominent intellectual philosopher in Bukhara, impacted the development of metaphysical thinking throughout history. He authored "*The Book of Healing*," often regarded as his most significant work. It was pivotal in shaping mediaeval Islamic

¹⁰. Khan, M. F. (1991). *Tarikh-i-Manazili-Bukhara*, p.90

¹¹. *ibid*, p.93

¹². Rante, R., Schwarz, F., & Tronca, L. (2022). *The Oasis of Bukhara, Volume 2: An Archaeological, Sociological and Historical Study* (Vol. 17): Brill.

¹³. *ibid*

¹⁴. Belo, C. (2023). *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam* By Frank Griffel: Oxford University Press, p. 73

philosophy and emerged as a seminal text for scholastic thinkers in Western intellectual traditions. Ibn Sina explored metaphysical inquiries about reality, existence, and the soul's essence in this significant scholarly endeavour. The individual developed a methodical framework for comprehending the metaphysical foundations of the cosmos, incorporating principles from both Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophies.¹⁵

The intellectual legacy of Ibn Sina transcended his day, as his theories exerted a tremendous influence on the realms of Islamic, Jewish, and Christian philosophy. The individual's investigation into the mind-body issue, causation, and the essence of the soul established the foundational principles for subsequent advancements in Western philosophy, notably evident in the intellectual contributions of philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas.¹⁶

Al-Biruni's Scientific Inquiry:

Al-Biruni, a prominent figure from Bukhara, was a versatile scholar whose intellectual endeavours encompassed philosophy, physics, and mathematics. The individual in question has gained significant recognition for his meticulous methodology in conducting empirical observations and his groundbreaking contributions to comparative religion. The philosophical significance of Al-Biruni resides in his systematic exploration of the natural world and his receptiveness to acquiring knowledge from diverse cultural and religious contexts.¹⁷ The seminal work authored by the individual in question, titled "The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology" (also known as "Kitab al-Qanun al-Mas'udi"), was a pioneering contribution to the discipline of astronomy.¹⁸

Al-Biruni's philosophical perspective emphasised the value of empirical data and the logical interpretation of the physical realm, a viewpoint that found resonance with the Enlightenment intellectuals in Europe. The contributions of this individual established the fundamental principles of the scientific method. They facilitated intercultural discourse, which was crucial in advancing contemporary philosophy and science.¹⁹

Alisher Navoi: The Intersection of Literature and Humanism

Although Alisher Navoi did not conform to the conventional definition of a philosopher,

¹⁵. Liarskiĭ, P. (1972). 50th anniversary of the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. *Gigienai Sanitariia*, 37(10), 3-7.

¹⁶. Posol'stvo, S. U. (1958). *USSR: Embassy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the USA*, p.54

¹⁷. Sachau, E. C. (2013). *Alberuni's India: An account of the religion, philosophy, literature, geography, chronology, astronomy, customs, laws and astrology of India: Volume I*: Routledge.

¹⁸. Rahul, R. (2000). *March of Central Asia*: Indus Publishing Company, p.231

¹⁹. Frye, R. N. (1965). *Bukhara: Medieval Achievement*, p.87

his role as a prominent poet and scholar during the Timurid Renaissance in Bukhara resulted in noteworthy advancements in the philosophical dimensions of literature and humanism. The literary works of the individual in question, most notably the "Chagatai Divan," delve into various themes such as love, the complexities of human nature, and the intricate dynamics between individuals and the divine.²⁰

Many people widely acclaim Alisher Navoi's poetry and philosophical contemplations for thoroughly elucidating the intricacies inherent in the human situation. Many people widely hail Alisher Navoi's poetry and philosophical considerations for explaining the difficulties inherent in the human condition. The individual's prioritisation of literature and the arts as catalysts for cultivating a kind and knowledgeable society is consistent with broader philosophical dialogues concerning the influence of culture on the formation of human values and comprehension.²¹

The Religious Trajectory of Bukhara:

According to historical accounts, numerous religions and religious practices have coexisted peacefully in Bukhara for a considerable time. The phenomenon of multiculturalism has played a significant role in shaping the city's identity, rendering it an intriguing destination for individuals with a scholarly inclination towards exploring diverse religious beliefs and their amicable cohabitation.²²

Religious Diversity and Coexistence:

The city of Bukhara has a notable characteristic in its rich historical background encompassing a diverse range of religious practices. Throughout history, Bukhara has been a dwelling place for individuals who have embraced various religious traditions, including Islam, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. Numerous areas of worship in Bukhara, including mosques, synagogues, churches, and fire temples, often placed close to one another, demonstrate the coexistence of various religious beliefs. Imam Bukhari, a notable figure of the Bukhara School of Hadith, authored the well-known compilation "*Sahih al-Bukhari*," widely recognised as one of the most reliable and authentic compilations of Hadith. The individual's rigorous approach to selecting Hadiths, guided by stringent standards to ensure their authenticity, established a standard for Hadith studies on a global scale.²³

²⁰. Babushkin, L. N., & Akramov, Z. M. (1973). *Soviet Uzbekistan*: Progress Publishers, p.341

²¹. Posol'stvo, S. U. (1958). *USSR: Embassy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the USA*, p. 64

²². Belo, C., *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam* By Frank Griffel, 2023 Oxford University Press, p. 89

²³. Rante, R., Schwarz, F., & Tronca, L. (2022). *The Oasis of Bukhara, Volume 2: An Archaeological, Sociological and Historical Study* (Vol. 17): Brill.

Scholarly Exchange and Religious Tolerance:

The urban centre's prioritisation of rigorous Hadith scholarship cultivated an intellectual milieu conducive to flourishing debates, discussions, and academic interactions. Academic scholars from various regions throughout the Islamic world were drawn to the city of Bukhara to pursue their studies under the tutelage of these esteemed teachers. The literary tradition in question has not only enhanced the intellectual discourse within the Islamic community but has also played a pivotal role in shaping the evolution of Islamic jurisprudence, ethics, and spirituality. In addition, the Maghoki-Attar Mosque, a highly esteemed Islamic religious site, is near the Chashma Ayub Mausoleum. This mausoleum holds excellent importance for adherents of Islamic and Zoroastrian faiths, owing to its association with the biblical figure Job.²⁴

The city of Bukhara's religious plurality facilitated a conducive atmosphere for exchanging intellectual ideas and practising religious tolerance. The urban centre was a hub for diverse religious intellectuals and theologians who actively participated in interfaith discussions and exchanged knowledge, transcending denominational divisions. A profound inclination towards intellectual inquisitiveness and deep regard for various belief systems significantly fostered Bukhara's diverse and intricate fabric of religious ideologies.²⁵

Bukhara was a hub for intellectual discourse during the Islamic Golden Age, mainly seen in the translation movement. Muslim academics, hailing from Bukhara and other regions, translated many religious, philosophical, and scientific books from Greek, Persian, Indian, and other languages into Arabic. The translations in question were of utmost significance in facilitating the exchange of information among diverse religious traditions, hence making notable contributions to advancing Islamic philosophy and theology.²⁶

Legacy and Contemporary Significance:

The enduring significance of Bukhara as a centre of religious diversity is pertinent in contemporary times. This phenomenon is evidence of the potential for religious pluralism and peaceful cohabitation within a global context frequently characterised by religious conflicts. Bukhara attracts scholars and travellers due to its profound religious history and the remarkable architectural remnants attributed to several religious sects.²⁷

²⁴. Lawton, J. (1991). Samarkand and Bukhara, p.54

²⁵. Solov'ev, L. V. (1956). *Adventures in Bukhara*, p.78

²⁶. Frye, R. N. (1965). *Bukhara: Medieval Achievement*, p.134

²⁷. Frank, A. J. (2012). *Bukhara and the Muslims of Russia: Sufism, education, and the paradox of Islamic prestige* (Vol. 26): Brill.

The persistent Significance of the Bukhara School of Hadith is apparent via the ongoing veneration of the scholarly contributions made by figures such as Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim, who were responsible for the compilation of the renowned "*Sahih Muslim*." These compilations persistently function as fundamental sources for comprehending Islamic beliefs and ethics, and scholars, jurists, and theologians in the present-day Islamic sphere reference them.²⁸

The city's religious variety and historical Significance have garnered attention from scholars and attracted international interest in recent times. Scholarly works such as "Bukhara: The Mediaeval Achievement" authored by Richard N. Frye, and "Bukhara: The Spirit of the Noble (Ummah)" written by Allama Sayyid Muhammad Hussain Tabatabai offer valuable perspectives on the religious history of Bukhara and its lasting influence on spiritual study and the promotion of interfaith cooperation.²⁹

Findings and Conclusion:

Bukhara's strategic positioning along the Silk Road facilitated the convergence of diverse cultural influences, rendering it a hub of cultural exchange. The location was a central point for exchanging commodities, concepts, and ideologies. The city's architectural, artistic, and culinary aspects are tangible manifestations of its multiculturalism.

Bukhara has historically been a hub for many religious traditions, encompassing Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism. The urban area hosts many religious establishments, including the esteemed Great Mosque of Bukhara and the Jewish Synagogue, which exemplify the harmonious cohabitation of diverse religious beliefs.

The city of Bukhara boasts a profound philosophical legacy, mainly within the realm of Islamic thought. Prominent intellectuals like Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and Al-Biruni have produced noteworthy advancements in philosophy, medicine, and mathematics. The impact of their writings on contemporary thought remains significant.

The city showcases an impressive collection of architectural marvels, including notable examples like the Ark of Bukhara, a substantial stronghold, and the Samanid Mausoleum, an exemplary specimen of Islamic architectural craftsmanship. These architectural formations provide evidence of the city's historical importance.

²⁸. Rante, R. (2019). *The Oasis of Bukhara, Volume 1: Population, depopulation and settlement evolution* (Vol. 12): Brill

²⁹. Solov'ev, L. V. (1956). *Adventures in Bukhara*, p.139