

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Development of Science and Cultural Life in Ustrushana During the Muslim Renaissance: Based on Archaeological and Written Sources

Nosirov Dilshod Murodulla ugli

Independent Researcher, Jizzakh State Pedagogical University, Uzbekistan

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Abstract

This article analyzes the development of science and cultural life in the territory of Ustrushana during the Islamic period on the basis of archaeological and written sources. It shows that Ustrushana's geographical location, its proximity to the branches of the Great Silk Road, urban planning, trade and crafts, irrigated agriculture, and defensive structures were important factors in the economic and cultural development of the region. The article also highlights the activities of the muhaddiths and faqihs who came from Ustrushana and their scholarly ties with Mawarannahr and other centers of Islamic learning. Using the examples of archaeological monuments of the Jizzakh oasis, such as Dizak, Kaliyatepa, Urda, Kizlartepa, Turtkultepa, and the Khudaysar rabat, the correspondence between the information in written sources and material evidence is examined.

KEY WORDS

Ustrushana, Islamic period, Dizak, Jizzakh, science, hadith, fiqh, archaeology, rabat, caravanserai, Great Silk Road, Samanids, Karakhanids.

INTRODUCTION

In the Middle Ages, Ustrushana was one of the important historical and cultural regions of Mawarannahr, and its development was shaped by the interaction of political, economic, religious, and scholarly processes. In particular, as a result of the arrival and consolidation of Islamic civilization in the region in the 9th–12th centuries, cities, trade routes, craft centers, and a religious and educational environment developed.

It is important to study the scholarly and cultural development of Ustrushana not only on the basis of written sources but also together with archaeological materials. This is because the ruins of cities, dwellings, rabats, caravanserais, ceramics, coins, architectural remains, and tombstones reveal the material foundations of the socio-economic and cultural processes in the region.

Ustrushana's geographical location was of particular importance for its scholarly and cultural development. The region was one of the areas of Mawarannahr where the caravan routes connecting the Samarkand, Chach, Fergana, and Eastern Turkestan directions intersected. The city of Dizak, in particular, occupied an important place in this trade system.

The accounts of 9th–10th century Arab and Persian geographers depict Dizak as a densely populated city with well-developed water and agricultural resources. Al-Muqaddasi describes Dizak as a city rich in gardens and fields, with running water, and convenient for merchants and travelers. The author of "Hudud al-Alam" notes that a large trade fair was held in the locality of Marsmand near the city.

This information shows that Dizak actively participated not only in local but also in interregional trade. Caravans coming from China and Eastern Turkestan through Chach to Dizak, as well as along the Fergana and Zaamin routes, enlivened the economic life of Ustrushana. The development of trade, in turn, created a solid economic foundation for crafts, urban development, and cultural exchange.

Archaeological research in the Jizzakh oasis shows that dense settlements existed in the northwestern part of Ustrushana in the Middle Ages. The discovery of more than forty rural settlements, fortresses, and rabats around Kaliyatepa and Urda materially confirms the information in written sources. The shift of urban life to the Urda area following the destruction of Kaliyatepa during the Arab conquest demonstrates the impact of political and economic processes in the region on the development of cities. The ancient cemeteries around Urda and the tombstones with Arabic inscriptions are important epigraphic sources confirming the establishment of Islamic culture in the region.

Archaeological excavations at Kizlartepa also provide important information about cultural life in the developed Middle Ages. The discovery here of dwellings built of pakhsha (rammed earth), well-plastered walls, compacted floors, glazed and unglazed ceramics, lamps, large storage jars (khums), cauldrons, and coins of the Karakhanid period indicates that urban and rural culture in the oasis had reached a high level of development in the 11th–12th centuries.

The economic and military-strategic importance of Ustrushana in the Islamic period cannot be imagined without the system of rabats. The rabats identified in the Jizzakh oasis initially served to ensure border defense, to restrain the raids of nomadic groups, and to control trade routes.

Written sources record the existence of numerous rabats and residences of “ghazis” around Dizak. Archaeological research has established that there were about twenty rabats in the Kaliyatepa irrigation area and more than ten around Urda. The fact that they were located 600–800 meters apart indicates the formation of an integrated defensive system protecting the oasis.

The Khudaysar rabat was also one of the important components of this system. Written sources describe it specifically for its prosperity and strategic location. In archaeological research, the Kukravat monument in the Jizzakh area has been associated with the Khudaysar rabat,

and the discovery there of 9th–12th century pottery and Samanid-period bricks supports this view. The caravanserais operating along the trade routes also constituted an important infrastructure of the cultural life of the region. The identification of the remains of about ten caravanserais between Jizzakh and Zaamin indicates the developed state of trade networks.

Among them, the Turtkultepa caravanserai deserves special attention. The architectural solutions of the monument, its two-gate structure, and its surviving arch show that it was an important structure in the system of ancient caravan routes. Archaeological materials date it to the Samanid period, which makes it possible to link it with the border rabats mentioned in written sources.

One of the important manifestations of Ustrushana’s cultural development is the formation of a scholarly environment. Medieval biographical and *tabaqat* sources contain information about many muhaddiths and faqihs associated with Ustrushana. Some studies note that more than eighty muhaddiths came from the region. The activities of the muhaddiths of Ustrushana were not limited to the local sphere. They traveled to Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorasan, Baghdad, Damascus, and other centers of learning, taking part in the transmission of hadith and in scholarly exchanges. These scholarly journeys show Ustrushana as an integral part of the wider Islamic scholarly space.

Scholars from Ustrushana also held an important position in the field of *fiqh*. Abu-l-Hasan Ghubdini and his descendants, as well as representatives of the scholarly dynasty founded by Majd al-Din Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Ustrushani, contributed to the development of Hanafi *fiqh*. Their scholarly legacy is closely connected with the development of juridical thought formed in the Karakhanid period, and some of their works were also used in later madrasa education. This process demonstrates the continuity of the scholarly environment in Ustrushana, the existence of master–disciple traditions, and the transmission of scholarly knowledge from generation to generation.

The development of science and culture in Ustrushana proceeded on the basis of the harmonious interaction of local traditions and Islamic scholarly values. Not only goods but also knowledge, ideas, religious views, technologies, and artistic traditions spread along the trade routes. The development of crafts such as pottery, weaving, carpet-making, and felt-making indicates a high level of material culture. Written

records of Dizak's fabrics made of wool and fine goat down (tivit) also show that craft specialization existed in the region.

The location of cities along trade routes, the functioning of rabats and caravanserais, and the development of agriculture and crafts created the economic conditions necessary for scholarly and cultural life. At the same time, mosques, madrasas, and other religious and educational institutions became the main institutions for the dissemination of Islamic knowledge.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the development of science and cultural life in Ustrushana during the Islamic period was a multifactorial historical process. Its foundation was formed by a favorable geographical location, the intersection of trade routes, irrigated agriculture, crafts, and the development of urban culture. The rabats, caravanserais, rural settlements, dwellings, cemeteries, ceramics, and coins studied in Dizak and its surroundings materially complement the information in written sources. In particular, the archaeological materials related to Kaliyatepa, Urda, Kizlartepa, Turtkultepa, and Khudaysar are an important source for reconstructing the economic and cultural life of Ustrushana in the 9th–12th centuries.

From a scholarly perspective, the significance of Ustrushana is further revealed through the activities of the muhaddiths and faqihs who came from it. Their ties with Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorasan, Baghdad, and other centers of learning show that Ustrushana was one of the active links in the wider Islamic scholarly network. Thus, the Islamic-period culture of Ustrushana can be assessed as a complex historical phenomenon formed as a result of the interaction of local historical traditions, Islamic scholarship, trade and economic relations, and intercultural exchange. A comprehensive study of its material and spiritual heritage on the basis of archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic, and written sources will make it possible to define more precisely the place of Ustrushana in the history of Mawarannahr and of Islamic civilization as a whole.

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