

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAM AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN THE TASHKENT OASIS (9th–12th CENTURIES)

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Abstract: This article explores the development of Islam and the institutionalization of religious life in the Tashkent oasis between the 9th and 12th centuries. Based on historical sources, archaeological findings, and Islamic legal texts, it examines how mosques, madrasas, and waqf (endowment) systems emerged and functioned under the rule of the Samanids, Karakhanids, and early Khwarazmshahs. The study reveals that Tashkent, as a frontier town, evolved into a significant religious and cultural center, shaped by the synthesis of Islamic principles and local traditions.

Keywords: Tashkent oasis, Islam, religious institutions, mosques, madrasas, Samanids, Karakhanids, Central Asia

The introduction of Islam to Central Asia in the 7th–8th centuries was followed by a more structured development of Islamic institutions in the subsequent centuries. The Tashkent oasis, located on the northeastern frontier of the Islamic world, became an important hub of religious, cultural, and intellectual exchange.

By the 9th century, under the Samanid dynasty, Islamic scholarship and religious practice were promoted actively across the region. The oasis saw the construction of major mosques and madrasas, while scholars and jurists contributed to the wider Islamic civilization. This process accelerated under the Karakhanid dynasty (10th–12th centuries), which promoted Sunni Islam and patronized religious institutions as a means of legitimizing their rule.

This article investigates how Islam was not only adopted but deeply institutionalized in the Tashkent oasis through religious endowments, scholarly networks, and architectural development. It also considers how religious life reflected broader socio-political changes in Central Asia during this period.

This research is based on interdisciplinary methods combining:

- **Primary sources:**

- Arabic and Persian chronicles, including *Tarikh-i Tabari*, *Hudud al-'Alam*, and *Tarikh-i Bukhara*
- Inscriptions on mosques and gravestones found in the Tashkent area
- Islamic legal texts regarding waqf and religious governance

- **Archaeological findings:**

- Excavations of early Islamic sites in and around Tashkent, such as the Dzhuma Mosque, Kufic-inscribed stones, and madrasa remains

- **Secondary sources:**

- Modern research by scholars such as R. Mukminova, A. Saidov, and R. Frye on Islamic Central Asia

Methods include source analysis, historical comparison, and contextual interpretation of material culture and religious documentation.

The findings indicate the following:

- **Institutional Growth:**

- From the 9th century onward, mosques were constructed as both religious and community centers.
- By the 11th century, madrasas began to appear, training scholars (*ulama*) in Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and Arabic grammar.

- **Waqf (Endowment) System:**

- Wealthy patrons endowed land and property to support religious institutions, ensuring their sustainability.
- Waqf deeds from the 10th–12th centuries show detailed provisions for mosque maintenance, teacher salaries, and support for students.

- **Intellectual Activity:**

- Tashkent became part of the broader network of Islamic scholarship connected to Samarkand, Bukhara, and Nishapur.
- Prominent scholars like Abu Bakr Tashkandi were active during this period.

- **Architectural Style:**

- The architecture of early mosques reflected both Sogdian and Islamic elements, with domes, minarets, and Kufic calligraphy as key features.

Development of Religious Institutions in the Tashkent Oasis (9th–12th centuries)

Century	Ruling Dynasty	Key Developments in Islam	Main Religious Institutions	Significance
9th	Samanids	Official patronage of Sunni Islam; spread of Hanafi jurisprudence	Friday mosques (Juma), early madrasas	Islam institutionalized as state religion; urban Islamic centers developed
10th	Samanids / Karakhanids	Increased waqf activity; mosque	Mosques with minarets,	Integration of religious and social

Century	Ruling Dynasty	Key Developments in Islam	Main Religious Institutions	Significance
		construction accelerated	endowment (waqf) offices	services through endowments
11th	Karakhanids	Expansion of Islamic education; emergence of local scholars	Advanced madrasas; Sufi khanaqahs	Religious education formalized; rise of <i>ulama</i> as legal and moral authorities
12th	Karakhanids / Khwarazmshahs	Continued architectural growth; religious elite gained social influence	Libraries, tomb-complexes, waqf-supported institutions	Islamic culture deeply rooted in urban life; religious institutions gained autonomy

The institutionalization of Islam in the Tashkent oasis during the 9th–12th centuries was not merely a religious process—it was closely linked to political legitimacy, social organization, and cultural identity. The rulers of the Samanid and Karakhanid dynasties supported Islamic institutions to consolidate their rule and foster civic unity.

The development of the waqf system allowed for financial independence and long-term sustainability of religious centers. These institutions played a dual role: they served religious purposes and acted as centers of education, administration, and social welfare.

Moreover, the religious elite—the *ulama*—emerged as a significant force in society. They were intermediaries between the ruling class and the local population and often acted as judges (qadis) and advisors. This reinforced the authority of Islamic law and morality in the region.

Although much of the material evidence has been lost or transformed, archaeological and written records confirm that the Tashkent oasis played a vital role in the early Islamic history of Central Asia. The religious institutions established in this period laid the foundation for the city's enduring cultural and spiritual identity.

Between the 9th and 12th centuries, the Tashkent oasis underwent a profound religious transformation marked by the integration of Islamic principles into the social and political fabric of the region. The establishment of mosques, madrasas, and waqf institutions reflects the depth and permanence of Islam's influence.

This period witnessed the emergence of a local Islamic tradition that blended global Islamic norms with regional customs and architecture. Religious institutions not

only shaped the moral and spiritual life of the population but also contributed to urban development, education, and governance.

Further studies may focus on the comparative development of religious institutions across Central Asian cities and the role of Tashkent in the transmission of Islamic knowledge beyond its borders.

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