



CHANGES IN SOCIAL RELATIONS IN URBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES DURING THE PERIOD OF ISLAMIZATION

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Abstract. *This article analyses how social relations changed in the urban and rural communities of Transoxiana (Movarounnahr) during Islamization. Islamization is treated not as a purely confessional act but as a long, uneven social transformation that unfolded under the pressure of new political authority, taxation, landholding, and local elites. In towns, change was bound up with administration, trade, mosques and madrasas, and the incorporation of new Muslim social groups; in villages, it was tied to land relations, peasant obligations, the local aristocracy, and the persistence of older customs. Fiscal obligations such as jizya and kharaj redefined social status, while jurists and Sufi shaykhs acted as mediators. The study reads Islamization as a differentiated yet interconnected process in city and countryside.*

Keywords: *Islamization, urban communities, rural communities, Transoxiana, social relations, local elites, taxation, landholding, religious transformation, social adaptation.*

Annotatsiya. *Maqolada islomlashuv jarayonida Movarounnahr shahar va qishloq jamoalaridagi ijtimoiy munosabatlarning o'zgarishi tahlil qilinadi. Islomlashuv sof e'tiqodiy akt emas, balki siyosiy hokimiyat, soliq tizimi, yer egaligi va mahalliy elitalar ta'sirida kechgan uzoq, notekis ijtimoiy transformatsiya sifatida ko'riladi. Shaharlarda o'zgarish boshqaruv, savdo, masjid va madrasalar hamda yangi musulmon qatlamlari bilan, qishloqlarda esa yer munosabatlari, dehqon*

majburiyatlari, mahalliy aristokratiya va eski urf-odatlarining saqlanishi bilan bog'liq bo'lgan. Jizya va xiroj kabi fiskal majburiyatlar ijtimoiy maqomni qayta belgilagani, ulamo hamda so'fiy shayxlari esa vositachi sifatida namoyon bo'lgani aniqlanadi. Tadqiqot islomlashuvni shahar va qishloqda turlicha, ammo o'zaro bog'liq jarayon sifatida talqin qiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: islomlashuv, shahar jamoalari, qishloq jamoalari, Movarounnahr, ijtimoiy munosabatlar, mahalliy elitalar, soliq siyosati, yer egaligi, diniy transformatsiya, ijtimoiy moslashuv.

Аннотация. В статье анализируется изменение социальных отношений в городских и сельских общинах Мавераннахра в эпоху исламизации. Исламизация рассматривается не как сугубо вероисповедный акт, а как длительная и неравномерная социальная трансформация, протекавшая под воздействием новой политической власти, налоговой системы, землевладения и местных элит. В городах перемены были связаны с управлением, торговлей, мечетями и медресе, а также с новыми мусульманскими слоями; в сёлах – с земельными отношениями, повинностями крестьян, местной аристократией и сохранением прежних обычаев. Установлено, что фискальные обязательства (джизья, харадж) переопределяли социальный статус, а улемы и суфийские шейхи выступали посредниками. Исламизация трактуется как различный, но взаимосвязанный процесс в городе и селе.

Ключевые слова: исламизация, городские общины, сельские общины, Мавераннахр, социальные отношения, местные элиты, налоговая политика, землевладение, религиозная трансформация, социальная адаптация.

INTRODUCTION. Islamization in Transoxiana (Movarounnahr) was never reducible to a change of creed. The sources and scholarly literature consistently present it as a reordering of the region's political, administrative, and socio-economic structure, in which religious affiliation became entangled with status, taxation, and access to authority [Movarounnahr shahar va qishloq jamoalari, 2024, b. 1–2]. To

treat the process as a single theological turning point is therefore to miss its central feature: it remade the relationships between rulers and subjects, landlords and cultivators, townspeople and villagers, and between older local elites and a new political order.

The problem this study addresses is the unevenness of that transformation across social and spatial environments. The same fiscal and religious pressures produced different outcomes in the dense, institutionally rich towns of the Zarafshan valley than in the villages and pastoral margins around them. In urban centres, change worked through administration, markets, mosques, and the rise of a juridical-religious elite; in the countryside, it worked through land tenure, peasant obligations, and the slow negotiation between sharia and customary practice. Reconstructing this difference – without collapsing it into a crude opposition of a "Muslim town" and a "traditional village" – is the aim of what follows.

MATERIALS AND METHODS. The study draws on written narratives of the conquest and the Samanid order, administrative and fiscal evidence concerning kharaj, jizya, and waqf, settlement and urban studies of Bukhara and Samarkand, and legal-anthropological work on the interaction of Islamic law with local custom, all as transmitted through modern scholarship. These materials are uneven in genre and reliability, and they are read here through source criticism that separates a text's factual content from its later interpretive framing.

Methodologically, the analysis combines historical-comparative reasoning with a sustained urban–rural comparison, treating the town and the village as distinct but linked arenas of change. A fiscal-social approach is used to connect tax categories to shifts in status, since in this period a person's fiscal obligation and religious affiliation were closely bound. A religious-transformation perspective, attentive to syncretism and to the mediating role of religious specialists, is applied where the evidence supports it. Methods are tied to specific questions rather than asserted in the abstract: comparison serves the city–village distinction, and fiscal-social analysis serves the link between taxation and social hierarchy.

RESULTS. *Urban communities and new forms of social hierarchy.* In the towns, the earliest restructuring was demographic and elite-centred. The settlement policy attributed to Qutayba ibn Muslim – requiring townspeople to vacate part of their dwellings for Muslims – placed conquerors and locals in immediate proximity and accelerated direct exposure to the new religion [Kozha, Abdilkhakim, Amangeldiyev, 2026, p. 157–159]. Conversion of the urban aristocracy mattered most: once the Bukhar-khudat Tughshada accepted Islam, adoption among the wider population became easier [Kozha, Abdilkhakim, Amangeldiyev, 2026, p. 157–159]. Over time, the spread of notarised, seal-bearing documents issued by the qadi's court turned jurists and muftis into one of the most influential social strata of the city [Movarounnahr shahar va qishloq jamoalari, 2024, b. 3–4]. Commerce reinforced this shift: Arabic became the language of administration and trade, and the new urban environment supported technological advances such as the introduction of paper manufacture at Samarkand in the eighth century [Haghnava, Alerasoul, 2014, p. 127–129]. The office of shaykh al-islam crowned this hierarchy, concentrating spiritual and scholarly authority at the apex of urban society [Ganiev, Turgunbaev, 2022, p. 1–3].

Rural communities, land relations, and local authority. In the countryside, authority remained anchored in land and in the older aristocracy. The Arabs called the local lords of the provinces "dihqans," and their social and political standing remained very high well into the Islamic period [Zinatullayev, 2024, p. 573–575]. The principal levy on state land was the kharaj, fixed at roughly one third of the harvest, which regulated agrarian relations as a whole; on privileged categories of land the burden could rise considerably higher [Zinatullayev, 2024, p. 573–575]. Where Islamic inheritance rules collided with local custom – for instance the practice by which a youngest son who cared for his parents inherited the estate – communities did not abandon the custom but reconciled it with sharia through legal devices such as gift (hiba) and endowment [Movarounnahr shahar va qishloq jamoalari, 2024, b. 4–5]. This accommodation of the so-called edgen arrangement through juristic

stratagems is precisely the pattern documented in the study of Islamic law and elder care in the region [Abdugafurov, Moran, 2016, p. 197–199]. Pastoral society stood furthest from these adjustments: the fuller Islamization of Turkic and nomadic groups proceeded slowly, hindered by a mobile way of life and by the perception of Islam as a religion suited to settled towns [Haghnavaaz, Alerasoul, 2014, p. 127–128].

Taxation and the reshaping of social status. Fiscal categories did more than fund the state; they sorted the population. The poll tax (jizya) imposed on those who did not convert produced a confessional stratification of society, marking non-Muslims off as a distinct fiscal-legal group [Haghnavaaz, Alerasoul, 2014, p. 128–130]. The reverse incentive was equally consequential: the relief granted under ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, which lifted the heavier land levy from converts and extended to them the standing of Arab Muslims, tied a change of status directly to a change of fiscal obligation [Kozha, Abdilkhakim, Amangeldiyev, 2026, p. 157–159]. Taxation thus became a hinge between political authority, religious affiliation, and social position.

Religious affiliation and communal boundaries. The encounter of the new doctrine with Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Tengrist traditions generated real social-religious tension rather than a smooth transition [Abdukadyr kyzy et al., 2025, p. 7–9]. Two mechanisms softened it. First, conversion from the top down dissolved older elite boundaries and pulled dependants after the converted notable. Second, Sufi orders offered interpretations compatible with local belief and so became central agents of accommodation and syncretism [Abdukadyr kyzy et al., 2025, p. 7–9]. The result was a layered "folk Islam" in which the new faith fused with inherited practice [Haghnavaaz, Alerasoul, 2014, p. 127–128].

Local elites as mediators. The transformation was managed less by decree than by intermediaries. In the countryside the dihqans, retaining prestige and serving in the administration, linked the old order to the new [Zinatullayev, 2024, p. 572–574]. In both town and village, imams, ulama, and Sufi shaykhs acted as brokers between rulers and the populace, not merely propagating doctrine but arbitrating social life

[Abdukadyr kyzy et al., 2025, p. 7–9]. Endowment underwrote their position: rulers and notables assigned land and revenue as waqf to mosques, madrasas, and khanaqahs, and along the frontier ribats and free shelters (sabil) sustained by waqf framed defence itself as a form of social participation [Orouji, Salimi, 2025, p. 1–3]. Such foundations also served elite strategy, since converting property into endowment shielded it and channelled patronage [Shaikh, 2018, p. 1222–1224].

Regional differences and continuity in everyday practice. The evidence concentrates on the irrigated towns of the Zarafshan basin – Bukhara and Samarkand – where caravanserais, markets, and madrasas thickened social ties and drew Turkic urban groups into governance after their conversion [Ganiev, Turgunbaev, 2022, p. 1–3]. The pastoral steppe changed more slowly and on different terms. At the level of daily life, continuity was pronounced: Sufi lodges and shrines were raised at springs, caves, and hills already held sacred, folding earlier cults into an Islamic frame, while life-cycle rites took on Quranic form without losing their communal function [Ungalov, p. 38–42]. The diffusion of learning reinforced this: madrasas taught not only fiqh and hadith but logic, philosophy, and the exact sciences, producing an intellectual stratum and opening a channel of social mobility [Mardonova, 2025, p. 8–9].

DISCUSSION. Read together, these findings argue against any model in which Islamization erased older social relations at a stroke. Transformation came through gradual interaction among political authority, fiscal policy, landholding, religious institutions, and communal adaptation, and it registered differently in town and country. Urban change was institutional and juridical: it produced courts, endowments, and a documented public life in which jurists and the shaykh al-islam acquired decisive weight, and in which education increasingly served the state's ideological needs [Mardonova, 2025, p. 8–9; Movarounnahr shahar va qishloq jamoalari, 2024, b. 3–4]. Rural change was agrarian and customary: it turned on the kharaj, on the standing of the dihqans, and on the quiet reconciliation of inherited practice with sharia [Zinatullayev, 2024, p. 573–575].

The materials also caution against a single explanation of why people changed affiliation. One line of evidence foregrounds fiscal compulsion, with the jizya generating confessional stratification and conversion offering escape from it [Haghnavaaz, Alerasoul, 2014, p. 128–130]. Another emphasises elite emulation and social mobility – the conversion of urban notables, the rise of new groups through learning, and the integrative work of Sufi syncretism [Kozha, Abdilkhakim, Amangeldiyev, 2026, p. 157–159; Abdukadyr kyzy et al., 2025, p. 7–9]. These readings are complementary rather than exclusive: fiscal accommodation, symbolic adaptation, social mobility, and deeper cultural transformation operated at once and at different depths. The flexibility of Islamic legal reasoning, which interpreted authoritative texts in light of local conditions, allowed the legal system to keep pace with this layered reality and to renew older communal units rather than simply abolish them [Hussain, 2017, p. 33–34, 40]. The eventual writing of scholarship in Persian carried that synthesis beyond the Arabic-reading elite to the wider population [Hussain, 2017, p. 45–46].

The urban–rural contrast should therefore be drawn carefully. It was not that towns embraced Islam while villages remained unchanged; rather, the institutional density of the town channelled change into administration, jurisprudence, and trade, while the countryside absorbed it through land, custom, and mediation. Both settings ultimately reorganised social relations around the new order, but by different routes and at different speeds.

CONCLUSION. Islamization in Transoxiana is best understood as a prolonged and uneven social transformation rather than a sudden or purely theological event. Urban and rural communities experienced this change in distinct yet interconnected forms – institutional and juridical in the towns, agrarian and customary in the villages. In the towns it advanced through administration, markets, mosques and madrasas, the qadi's court, and the rise of jurists and the shaykh al-islam, accompanied by the incorporation of new Muslim and Turkic groups. In the countryside, by contrast, it was bound up with landholding and the kharaj, with the

enduring authority of the dihqans, and with the reconciliation of customary practice and sharia through various legal devices. Taxation, and jizya and kharaj above all, served as a mechanism of social classification, binding fiscal obligation to religious affiliation and status. Within this process local elites, the ulama, and Sufi shaykhs acted as mediators who managed the transition and softened the tension between older traditions and the new authority, with the waqf furnishing its material foundation. Yet beneath formal conversion there persisted a broad field of continuity in everyday communal life, so that adaptation, accommodation, and genuine transformation coexisted across the region.

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