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CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE IN USTRUSHANA DURING THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada Ustrushonaning ilk o‘rta asrlardagi siyosiy, iqtisodiy, madaniy va diniy hayoti tahlil qilinadi. Shuningdek, hududda buddaviylik, zardushtiylik, nasroniylik va islom dinlarining tarqalishi, diniy bag‘rikenglik muhiti hamda islom sivilizatsiyasining shakllanish jarayonlari tadqiq etilgan. Maqolada Ustrushonaning ilm-fan, hadis va fiqh ilmlarining rivojlanishidagi o‘rni, hanafiylik mazhabining tarqalishiga qo‘shgan hissasi ham ko‘rsatib berilgan.
Kalit so‘zlar. Ustrushona, rabot, madrasa, Renessans, Eltabar, faqih, xadis, nasroniylar, Majduddin Ustrushoniy, Buttam, butxona, Abu Jafar Tabariy, Nujket, budda, numizmatika, hanafiy mazhabi, buddaviylik.
Abstract. This article examines the political, economic, cultural, and religious life of Ustrushana during the Early Middle Ages. It also investigates the spread of Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam within the region, highlighting the atmosphere of religious tolerance and the processes that contributed to the formation of Islamic civilization. Furthermore, the study explores Ustrushana’s role in the advancement of scholarship, particularly in the fields of hadith and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), as well as its contribution to the dissemination of the Hanafi school of law.
Keywords: Ustrushana, rabat, madrasa, Renaissance, Eltabar, faqih, hadith, Christians, Majd al-Din al-Ustrushani, Buttam, temple, Abu Ja‘far al-Tabari, Nujket, Buddha, numismatics, Hanafi school of law, Buddhism.
Аннотация. В данной статье анализируются политическая, экономическая, культурная и религиозная жизнь Уструшаны в эпоху раннего Средневековья. Особое внимание уделяется распространению на территории региона буддизма, зороастризма, христианства и ислама, исследуются процессы формирования исламской цивилизации, а также особенности религиозной толерантности в обществе. В статье раскрывается роль Уструшаны в развитии науки, хадисоведения и исламского правоведения (фикха), а также её вклад в распространение ханафитского мазхаба в Центральной Азии.
Ключевые слова: Уструшана, рабат, медресе, Ренессанс, Эльтабар, факих, хадис, христиане, Маджддуддин Уструшани, Буттам, храм, Абу Джафар ат-Табари, Нуджкет, Будда, нумизматика, ханафитский мазхаб, буддизм.

Following a prolonged silence in the historical record after Antiquity, the earliest references to Ustrushana appear in Chinese chronicles of the Early Middle Ages (6th–7th centuries CE), where the region is recorded under various forms such as *Sudiyshana*, *Shuayduana*, *Sudushina*, *Szebuyueyuyna*, *Eastern Sao*, *Sudulishina*, and *Sao*. In Arabic and Persian sources, it is mentioned as *Surushana*, *Sutrushana*, *Osrushana*, *Surushna*, *Oshrusena*, *Usrushana*, *Ustrushane*, *Ushrusona*,

and *Istarafshan*. In modern historiography, the designation Ustrushana has become the most widely accepted and standardized form[1].

The State of Ustrushana occupied a strategically significant position from both geographical and geopolitical perspectives. Information concerning Ustrushana and its borders, preserved in the works of Arab geographers and Chinese authors, primarily dates to the ninth and tenth centuries, although these boundaries appear to have differed little from those of the seventh and eighth centuries. In terms of present-day administrative divisions, Ustrushana encompassed the districts of Ayni, Matcha, Shahristan, Ura-Tyube (Istaravshan), and Nau within the Sughd Region of the Republic of Tajikistan; the territories of Jizzakh (ancient Faghnan), Khavas, Gallaorol (Kharakana), and Zaamin in the Republic of Uzbekistan; as well as the Laylak District of the Kyrgyz Republic. To the south, the region was bounded by the Turkestan mountain range[2].

Although much of Ustrushana consisted of desert landscapes, the region witnessed the construction of numerous *rabats* (fortified caravan stations), caravanserais, fortresses, towns, and rural settlements, particularly in the foothill zones. Having alternately formed part of Sogdiana and the confederation of the "Saka tribes beyond Sogd" in antiquity, Ustrushana emerged as an independent political and cultural entity during the early and medieval periods. It subsequently became one of the most influential centers of learning and culture in Transoxiana (*Mawarannahr*). The formation of a distinctive and highly developed culture in Early Medieval Ustrushana resulted from the interaction of several closely interconnected geographical, economic, and political factors. First, the region's geographical location, surrounded by the Turkestan mountain system, provided a natural defensive barrier. This favorable setting created a relatively secure environment protected from external incursions, thereby facilitating the stable development of urban life and cultural institutions. Second, the introduction and gradual consolidation of Islam further enriched and elevated the region's cultural landscape, contributing significantly to its intellectual and spiritual transformation.

Ustrushana was situated at a strategic crossroads of the Silk Roads, with its Khavas route extending eastward through China and Korea as far as Japan[3]. Valuable information regarding the network of Silk Road routes traversing Ustrushana during the medieval period is preserved in the anonymous geographical treatise *Hudud al-'Alam* ("The Regions of the World"). In this work, Ustrushana is referred to as *Sarushana*, and the following description, dating to the tenth century, is provided: "Sarushana is a large and prosperous province, abundant in blessings, with many towns and villages. Wine is produced there in great quantities, and iron is extracted from its mountains." The cities and settlements of Zaamin, Charqon, Dizak, Navinjkas, Faghkas, Gharq, Sobot, Kurkas, and Butamon are listed as constituent parts of Sarushana. The treatise also offers valuable information about Zaamin and Jizzakh, noting, for example, that Zaamin was located on the route connecting Khujand and Fergana and possessed a strong and well-fortified citadel[4]. Due to its

[1] Negmatov, N. N. (1957). *Ustrushana v drevnosti i rannem srednevekov'e* [Ustrushana in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages]. Stalinabad.

[2] Negmatov, N. N. (1957). *Ustrushana v drevnosti i rannem srednevekov'e* [Ustrushana in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages]. Stalinabad.

[3] *Etnicheskii atlas Uzbekistana* [Ethnic Atlas of Uzbekistan]. (2002). Tashkent.

[4] *Ustrushonadan o'tuvchi savdo yo'llari arab va fors mualliflari nigohida* [Trade Routes Passing through Ustrushana in the Accounts of Arab and Persian Authors]. Retrieved from

geographical position in the central part of Transoxiana and at the intersection of major commercial routes, Ustrushana occupied an important political and economic role in Central Asia. Trade and military roads connecting Shash (Tashkent), Fergana, Samarkand, and Khujand passed through its territory. Consequently, the region attracted the attention of numerous political powers and became the object of recurring struggles for control. At the same time, the cultural, economic, and religious cohesion that developed within Ustrushana transformed it into an integral component of Central Asian civilization. The Silk Roads served as the principal mechanism for fostering commercial exchange, intellectual interaction, and cultural dialogue among diverse peoples and civilizations across Eurasia.

The passage of the Silk Roads through the territory of Ustrushana exerted a profound influence on the region's culture, economy, and religious life. Commercial activities were primarily conducted through monetary transactions and the exchange of goods, with interactions between settled agricultural communities and nomadic pastoral groups playing a particularly significant role. However, barter-based exchange was often constrained by practical limitations and inefficiencies. Consequently, the use of copper and gold coinage as a medium of exchange represented a major advancement in the development of trade and economic relations[5]. During the Early Middle Ages, coins circulating in Central Asia were predominantly minted with Sogdian inscriptions and frequently contained both Turkic and Sogdian linguistic elements. The earliest coinage of Ustrushana was likewise inscribed in the Sogdian language. From the seventh century onward, the names of prominent Ustrushanian *Afshins*—including Rakhanch, Satachari, Chirdmish, and later Eltabar—began to appear regularly on local coinage. Furthermore, the presence of Christian symbols on certain Ustrushanian coins indicates that Christianity had also reached the region. The silver and copper coins minted by Ustrushanian rulers testify to the country's economic prosperity and reflect the advanced development of agriculture, craftsmanship, and regional trade.

The migration of Turkic tribes into Ustrushana during the period commonly referred to as the "Great Migration Era" brought about significant demographic transformations. Relations between the incoming Turkic groups and the indigenous sedentary population evolved beyond temporary interaction and gradually developed into a long-term process of integration. This transformation was reflected not only in patterns of everyday life but also in language, culture, religious beliefs, and administrative structures. As a result, a unified ethnocultural space emerged within Ustrushana. Improved living conditions, the flourishing of caravan trade, and the patronage of learning by local rulers contributed to the emergence of Ustrushana as one of the major intellectual and spiritual centers of Transoxiana. Madrasas, mosques, libraries, and centers of hadith scholarship operated throughout the region. The mention of numerous Ustrushanian scholars and jurists (*fuqahāʾ*) in written historical sources further attests to the region's significant contribution to the intellectual life of the Islamic world[6].

With regard to the religious beliefs of the population, the foundations of religious consciousness in Ustrushana can be traced back to the Middle Paleolithic period. Various forms of

https://www.academia.edu/114099115/USTRUSHONADAN_O_TUVCHI_SAVDO_YO_LLARI_ARAB_VA_FORS_MUALLIFLARI_NIGOHIDA

[5] Boboyorov, G., G'oyibov, B., & Kubatin, A. (2020). *O'rta Osiyo bitiklari – I. Sug'diy yozma yodgorliklar* [Inscriptions of Central Asia – I. Sogdian Written Monuments]. Tashkent: Tafakkur.

[6] Ataev, M. R. (2025). *Ustrushona ilmiy-madaniy markazi* [The Scientific and Cultural Center of Ustrushana]. Tashkent.

indigenous belief systems coexisted over time, encompassing traditions such as totemism, shamanism, and Manichaeism, alongside more institutionalized religions including Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Buddhism and Christianity, both belonging to the major world religions, entered the region gradually through cultural and commercial contacts.

During the Early Medieval period, the inhabitants of Ustrushana demonstrated a notable degree of religious tolerance. Although Buddhism appears to have been the dominant faith among a substantial portion of the population, adherents of other religions were able to practice their beliefs freely, and there is no evidence of coercive conversion to Buddhism. Prior to the introduction of Islam, the population adhered to a variety of religious traditions, among which Buddhism was particularly widespread. The prevalence of image worship and Buddhist practices is also reflected in historical accounts. Evidence regarding the existence of idol worship in Ustrushana is found in the writings of Abu Jaʿfar al-Tabari. According to his account, in 119 AH/737 CE, refugees led by the heir of Khuttal, Akha Jish, sought refuge in Ustrushana from Arab military campaigns. These refugees reportedly brought with them numerous golden idols, which were installed in local temples. Subsequently, when Arab forces under Qutayba Jakhma ibn Zahra reconquered the Buttam region, golden idols were among the spoils of war they seized. Archaeological discoveries provide further evidence of the strong presence of Buddhism in Ustrushana[7]. Excavations at a Buddhist temple in the village of Nujket, dating to the first and second centuries CE, uncovered sculptures depicting the Buddha and Bodhisattvas seated alongside lions and dogs[8]. Similarly, terracotta cult figurines have been recovered from the archaeological site of Oqtepa near Zaamin. The discovery of such artifacts, together with historical references to golden idols housed in temples, strongly suggests that Buddhism was practiced by a significant proportion of the population. Prior to the arrival of Manichaeism in the region, Buddhism appears to have been one of the most influential religious traditions among the inhabitants of Ustrushana. Historical sources indicate that, on the eve of the introduction of Islam, Ustrushana was emerging as one of the most cohesive and distinctive political and economic centers of Central Asia. Owing to the diplomatic policies pursued by the Afshin rulers, the region managed to preserve its political autonomy until the beginning of the ninth century. The advent of Islam became a significant catalyst for transformation, accelerating social, economic, and spiritual developments within society. During the initial stages of Islamization, various economic privileges were extended, facilitating the integration of local communities into the new socio-political order. Under the influence of Islamic teachings, the lifestyle of the indigenous population, as well as their social relations, family structures, and legal institutions, underwent substantial change. Ethical values were redefined, while a number of traditional customs that contradicted Islamic principles gradually declined or disappeared altogether. Consequently, Islamic norms and values shaped a new phase in the cultural development of Ustrushana[9].

More broadly, during the early Islamic period, trade and economic relations within the domestic markets of Ustrushana expanded considerably. Population growth, stimulated in part by new waves of migration, contributed to the increasing vitality of the region. The interaction of these demographic, economic, and cultural factors significantly accelerated Ustrushana's political,

[7] *Ustrushonaning ilk o'rta asr qishloq makoni* [The Rural Landscape of Early Medieval Ustrushana].
[8] Albaum, P. I. (1955). *Buddiiskii khram v doline Sanzar* [The Buddhist Temple in the Sanzar Valley]. Tashkent.
[9] Ataev, M. R. (2025). *Ustrushona ilmiy-madaniy markazi* [The Scientific and Cultural Center of Ustrushana]. Tashkent.

economic, intellectual, and cultural development. The history of hadith scholarship in Ustrushana can be traced to the arrival of Arab missionaries led by the Companion Saʿīd ibn ʿUthmān in 57 AH/677 CE. Their presence demonstrates the early importance attributed to this region within the broader process of Islamic expansion and religious outreach. Historical accounts further indicate that among these missionaries was the Companion Qutham ibn Abbas, who is reported to have visited Ustrushana. According to local traditions, the final moments of his life were spent in the village of Shirakas, where his funeral prayer was also conducted. Such accounts underscore the region's growing significance as a center of religious and scholarly activity[10]. Indeed, by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Ustrushana had developed into an important center of hadith studies, attracting both local and Arab traditionists (*muhaddithūn*) who contributed to the preservation and transmission of Islamic scholarship.

Ustrushana also served as one of the principal centers for the formation and dissemination of the Hanafi school of law in Central Asia. Its contribution to the widespread adoption of Hanafism throughout Transoxiana was particularly significant. Scholars of the region actively participated in the development of Sunni intellectual traditions, while Ustrushana itself became renowned for its advanced scholarly institutions, especially in the field of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Sources indicate that fiqh studies began to spread extensively throughout Ustrushana during the period of the Samanid Empire. The scholarly activities of Ustrushanian jurists constituted an important contribution to the advancement of knowledge, education, and culture across the medieval Islamic world. These jurists analyzed local traditions, customs, and social practices through the framework of Islamic legal principles, adapting them to evolving historical and social realities. Through this process, they established a distinctive intellectual tradition that played a vital role in facilitating the spread of Muslim culture into new regions. Their legal writings and scholarly works significantly enhanced the prestige of Ustrushana, elevating it to the status of a prominent intellectual and cultural center. The scholarly and cultural center of Ustrushana, whose foundations were laid during the First Islamic Renaissance, reached its zenith in the second half of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth century. During this period, the principles of Islamic jurisprudence became firmly institutionalized and were further enriched through their interaction with local intellectual traditions and accumulated scholarly knowledge. As a result, Ustrushana emerged as one of the leading centers of Islamic legal thought and learning in Central Asia.

In conclusion, Ustrushana was one of the most significant geo-cultural and political centers of Central Asia and occupied a distinctive place in the formation and development of Islamic civilization. Throughout its history, Ustrushana maintained a strong aspiration for political autonomy while preserving its cultural traditions and regional connections. Rather than being incorporated through abrupt transformation, the region gradually and organically became an integral part of the Islamic civilization. The acceptance of Islam was not solely the result of external political influence; rather, it was facilitated by the internal spiritual and social needs of the local population. Consequently, Islam exerted a profound and enduring influence on the historical development of the region, shaping its religious, cultural, intellectual, and social foundations for centuries. The cities and rural settlements (*rustāqs*) of Ustrushana evolved not only into centers of economic activity but also into important hubs of scholarship, education, and intellectual exchange. The region's distinctive historical, social, and intellectual environment was particularly evident between the ninth and twelfth centuries, a period often associated with the First Renaissance of

[10] Ataev, M. R. (2025). *Ustrushona ilmiy-madaniy markazi* [The Scientific and Cultural Center of Ustrushana]. Tashkent.

Central Asia. During this era, Ustrushana experienced remarkable scientific and cultural flourishing. The scholars who lived and worked in the region—including jurists (*fuqahā'*), judges (*quḍāt*), engineers, and intellectuals—made significant contributions not only to the development of Ustrushana itself but also to the broader intellectual advancement of Transoxiana and the Islamic world as a whole. Alongside the broader traditions of Islamic jurisprudence and hadith scholarship, Ustrushana fostered systematic scholarly approaches to issues such as children's rights, family law, and social relations. These developments demonstrate the region's active participation in the evolution of Islamic legal thought. The scholarly legacy of Majd al-Din al-Ustrushani provides a particularly compelling example of this intellectual tradition. His contributions illustrate the depth and sophistication of Ustrushana's scholarly heritage and its enduring influence on the development of Islamic jurisprudence.

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