

MIFTAAH SEMINAR

TRANSOXIANA: THE LAND OF SCHOLARS



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SESSION 1

Introduction of Transoxiana

- It can be said in two different ways, Transoxiana or Transoxania. This is an ancient name that refers to a region located in lower Central Asia.
- In Arabic it is called ما وراء النهر (Mā Warā' al-Nahr) meaning "That which Lies Beyond the River".
- In modern day it is known as Uzbekistan, parts of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, as well as parts of Afghanistan. Otherwise, it is also known as the STAN countries.
- This region is located between two rivers, beyond the east of the Amu Darya (Oxus River) and west of the Syr Darya (Jaxartes River). The Oxus River was known to the Arabs as the Jayhun River.
- After Makkah, Islam was being taught and practiced in Medina, Baghdad, Kufa, Basra, Sham, Damascus, Quds, Zanud, Yemen etc.
- Medina and Kufa became prominent centers of Islamic learning. Abdullah Ibn Masood, Ali Ibn Talib, to name a few, all moved to Kufa.
- Later on, the Companions as well as their followers traveled and moved to different parts of the world to spread Islam, and soon set foot in Central Asia.

- The land gave birth to many great scholars and “Scholars in the land beyond the river” were often cited by many in books of fiqh, aqeedah, hadith etc.

Historical Background and Islamic Heritage

- Transoxiana is a preeminent part of our Islamic heritage, history and scholarship.
- This land has produced thousands of great Islamic scholars of hadith, jurists and saints of the Muslim ummah.
- The process of islamization of the locals took place during the Umayyad Caliphate period, and became more intensive during the following Abbasid Caliphate period.
- Islam soon began spreading across Central Asia and it became the headquarters of Islamic learning.
- The scholars residing in this region later on became a source of evidence, a proof, for those in the Arabian lands.
- This legacy is pertinent in our Islamic history as it shows that our scholars were not racist and respected people of knowledge.
- The people from Arabic speaking lands gave equal respect to the people of knowledge and wisdom from Transoxiana. They were always prioritized and given authority, regardless of their color, creed, background, nationality etc.
- This trait is also in line with the Prophet SAW’s characteristic in which he was always fair to all. For example, he did not favor any of his Quraysh Companions, instead appointed Bilal Ibn Rabah to be the first person to call the athan.

ان يَقُولُ كَانَ الْمُسْلِمُونَ حِينَ قَدِمُوا الْمَدِينَةَ يَجْتَمِعُونَ فَيَتَحَيَّنُونَ الصَّلَاةَ، لَيْسَ يُنَادَى لَهَا، فَتَكَلَّمُوا يَوْمًا فِي ذَلِكَ، فَقَالَ بَعْضُهُمْ اتَّخَذُوا نَاقُوسًا مِثْلَ نَاقُوسِ النَّصَارَى. وَقَالَ بَعْضُهُمْ بَلْ بُوَقًا مِثْلَ قَرْنِ الْيَهُودِ. فَقَالَ عُمَرُ أَوْلَا تَبْعَثُونَ رَجُلًا يُنَادِي بِالصَّلَاةِ. فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " يَا بِلَالُ قُمْ فَنادِ بِالصَّلَاةِ " .

Narrated Ibn `Umar: When the Muslims arrived at Medina, they used to assemble for the prayer, and used to guess the time for it. During those days, the practice of Adhan for the prayers had not been introduced yet.

Once they discussed this problem regarding the call for prayer. Some people suggested the use of a bell like the Christians, others proposed a trumpet like the horn used by the Jews, but `Umar was the first to suggest that a man should call (the people) for the prayer; so Allah's Messenger (SAW) ordered Bilal to get up and pronounce the Adhan for prayers. (Sahih al-Bukhari 604)

- This attribute of respect was also apparent amongst the Companions. They instilled this throughout their teachings and it carried on for generations after.
- In later generations, these Muslims from the Arab lands, started taking hadith scholars, jurists, saints, ulama of this region as authority. They became a 'hujjah' (proof) for the people residing on the other side of the river.
- The six major hadith collections produced by scholars from this region were, Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan Tirmidhi, Sunan Ibn Majah, Sunan Abu Dawud, Sunan Nasai – all of these authors are none Arabs.
- Imam Bukhari or Muhammad Ibn Ismail was from Uzbekistan. His book became cited side by side with the book of Allah SWT, the Quran. He is from a Persian heritage and his original native language was Persian.

- Before the invasions, the people of Central Asia spoke in an Iranian tongue, as well as in the language of Farsi (Persian).
- Imam Muslim, Imam Ibn Majah and Imam Abu Dawud were all from Iran. While Imam Tirmidhi was from Uzbekistan. Regardless of their background or where they came from, Muslims in this land also took all of them as authority.
- All classical books on hadith, fiqh, aqeedah and other books that we have, were from the region and are often cited.
- Other great Islamic luminaries that hailed from this region are Abu Ali Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī (al-Khwarizmi), Mīrzā Muhammad Tāraghay bin Shāhruk (Ulugh Beg), Abu al-Layth al-Samarqandi and etc.
- For 70 years the region was oppressed under the Soviet regime, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). However, they regained independence after the regime collapsed and became independent sovereign countries.
- Today, the countries in this region are not fully Islamically established but are under Muslim rule.

Muslim Conquest of Transoxiana

- During the time of the Companions, Muslims started venturing into these lands. Initially, they only conquered the lands until the river and not beyond it.
- However, later on there were some small expeditions that took place by the Companions. A small garrison and armies were sent every year to raid and plunder the native principalities.
- They ventured into Khurasan (comprising most of present-day north eastern Iran, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan), which was the gateway to Transoxiana, during the reign of Umar Ibn al-Khattab and Uthman Ibn Affan.

- The first expedition by the Arabs across the river was under Ahnaf ibn Qais, a veteran military commander, in 652. After that, a few more expeditions took place.
- They held peace talks, spread some teachings of Islam but nothing was majorly successful. Most of the conquests and engagements were not effective. Some lands were conquered but taken back.
- The larger part of Transoxiana was finally conquered by an Arab commander of the Umayyad Caliphate known as Abu Hafs Qutayba ibn Abī Ṣāliḥ Muslim or Qutayba Ibn Muslim.
- Qutayba was a renowned seasoned leader and was known as a person of hikmah, full of wisdom and bravery. He was a capable soldier, a great administrator, an intelligent and pious man.
- He was the main person consolidating and expanding Muslim rule in Transoxiana. He became a governor of Khurasan.
- Later on the Abbasid Caliphate took over the Khurasan, and gave it much more concrete control and development, with some of the cities becoming the major cities of the world – Samarkand was a center of trade and excellence, it flourished.
- The Abbasid redeveloped and made it flourish economically. In the second and third centuries it became the Gold Age of the Muslims. Bukhara became an Islamic centre of learning, art, culture etc. Bukhara and Samarkand both were equally thriving.

Dark Period for The Muslims

- After a successful period, the light of Islam vanished in Transoxiana between the twelfth and thirteenth century.
- Darkness came for the Muslims when the Mongols invaded Central Asia. It was seen as the greatest catastrophe in the history of Islamic civilization.
- Allah SWT alternates light and darkness. This ayah reminds us, there will be the good and not so good days where He tests the believers.

إِن يَمَسُّكُمْ قَرْحٌ فَقَدْ مَسَّ الْقَوْمَ قَرْحٌ مِّثْلُهُ ۚ وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ
وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَيَتَّخِذَ مِنْكُمْ شُهَدَاءَ ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ

If a wound should touch you - there has already touched the [opposing] people a wound similar to it. And these days [of varying conditions] We alternate among the people so that Allah may make evident those who believe and [may] take to Himself from among you martyrs - and Allah does not like the wrongdoers (3:140)

- Genghis Khan used terror as a weapon of war and conquered land after land. He massacred civilians as well as brutally murdered many Islamic scholars. In the same area where Imam Bukhari used to teach scholars, 15,000 murdered them and threw their bodies.
- During the Mongol invasion, they showed no discretion. Many of humanity's greatest centers of education, commerce and culture became nothing more than killing fields.
- Centuries of knowledge accumulated from every literate civilization and contained in the world's largest libraries were reduced to ashes, mosques, hospitals, and palaces were destroyed.
- However, within a generation, the tide had begun to turn in Islam's favor. The vast Mongol empire was divided amongst the various descendants of Genghis.
- His heir, Timur Khan, brought Islam back to these lands. Timur founded the Timurid Empire and became the first ruler of the Timurid dynasty but his reign did not last for long.
- During the eighteenth century, the Russian Empire set out on a conquest to take over Central Asia. In the nineteenth century, it was formerly controlled by the Soviet Union.

- For several decades, Islam was back to darkness. Soviets and communists were oppressing Muslims in the lands. Muslims were punished and banned from fasting, prayer, reading and teaching the Quran etc.
- The Russians force fed them with pork and alcohol in Ramadan, they burnt copies of the Quran and shut mosques and madrasas.
- Despite the oppression, for 74 years, the scholars of that time made underground bunkers, prayed and taught the Quran in secrecy, to preserve their faith and iman.
- In 1989, the Russians withdrew after the Soviet-Afghan war. All the Central Asian countries declared independence in 1991.
- Although the Russians physically stopped their occupation, they left behind their ideologies and legacy until this very day. For example, Russian remains the second language of Uzbekistan.
- The situation has improved slightly for the Muslims in Central Asia but there has never been complete freedom for Islam.
- In Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev was elected as the new president in 2016. Since then, Islam has been more progressive, many mosques have reopened and people are granted more religious freedom.