

The Role of Caravanserais in The Internal and External Trade of The Bukhara Emirate

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study investigates the economic and social functions of caravanserais in the Bukhara Emirate, emphasizing their role in facilitating internal and external trade, supporting merchant activity, and contributing to the economic infrastructure during the 18th-19th centuries. **Method:** Employing a historical-analytical approach, the research draws upon primary archival sources, travel accounts, and comparative analysis to classify caravanserais by function, examine taxation policies, and reconstruct trade routes. Quantitative data are utilized to assess the growth and economic impact of these structures on urban development and international commerce. **Results:** The findings reveal that by the 19th century, Bukhara's caravanserais had evolved into essential trade and financial hubs, with over 60 establishments serving as centers for goods storage, merchant accommodation, and tax collection. Their expansion paralleled increasing trade with Russia, facilitating Bukhara's integration into regional and global markets. **Novelty:** This study contributes a systematic classification of caravanserais and unveils their specialized economic roles, offering new insights into taxation systems, urban planning, and transnational trade networks. It presents a recontextualized understanding of caravanserais as dynamic instruments of economic policy and infrastructure in Central Asia.

INTRODUCTION

The city of Bukhara is one of the oldest and most significant trade centers in Central Asia, having developed over centuries as a crossroads of international trade routes. Particularly during the era of the Great Silk Road, Bukhara emerged as one of the largest economic and cultural hubs in the region. The development of trade relations and the establishment of a favorable infrastructure for merchants played a crucial role in the city's economic progress. In this process, caravanserais held a special significance, serving not only as temporary accommodations for merchants and travelers but also as centers for trade and financial transactions [1].

The significance of caravanserais in Bukhara was evident in various aspects of the city's economic life. They functioned as specialized facilities designed to regulate regional and international trade processes, provide convenience for merchants, and store goods. Furthermore, these trade establishments played an essential role in tax collection by the state, ensuring efficient economic management and strengthening commercial relations. Additionally, caravanserais contributed to the emergence of handicraft centers and various service institutions, thereby fostering economic and social development [2].

RESEARCH METHOD

Literature review

The period from the middle 18th century to the early 20th century provides valuable insights into the economy of the Bukhara Emirate through various scholarly sources. These sources can be conditionally classified into the following groups:

1. Historical works published during the Russian Empire and Soviet era [3].
2. Historical studies and research findings produced during the years of independence [4].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Bukhara was one of the most significant centers along the ancient Silk Road and was renowned for centuries as a hub of trade, culture, and science. With the expansion of trade relations, caravanserais were constructed in the city to support commerce, ensure the safety of merchants, and provide them with comfortable living conditions. From the middle 18th century to the early 20th century, the Bukhara Emirate played a crucial role in the history of Uzbek statehood, placing particular emphasis on economic development. Supporting entrepreneurship and strengthening trade relations within the emirate were among its primary objectives [5].

The Bukhara Emirate actively engaged in external trade relations with neighboring khanates and states. The growth and intensification of trade interactions increased the significance of caravanserais, necessitating enhanced security measures for caravan routes. Many of Bukhara's caravanserais were constructed according to a unified plan. The majority of these structures were built between the late 18th and early 19th centuries. According to scholarly research, there were ten caravanserais in Bukhara at the beginning of the 19th century, while P.I. Demezov, in his memoirs, mentioned 25 caravanserais. This indicates that caravanserais had begun to serve as fundamental elements of economic relations [6].

E.K. Meyendorf's records mention 14 caravanserais in Bukhara, with the largest being the Abdullajon Caravanserai, built in 1819. N.V. Khanikov provides information that in the 1840s, there were 24 stone and 14 wooden caravanserais in Bukhara. The increasing number of caravanserais and their mention in travelers' writings indicate a certain level of economic development in the emirate [7].

By the 1860s, the number of caravanserais in Bukhara had reached 36. In the early 1840s, Qarshi had 3 caravanserais, increasing to 10 by 1863. Similarly, in the 1860s, Shahrisabz had 7 caravanserais, while Kitob had. Various travelers, including Y. Schuyler, H. Vambery, and E. Meyendorf, documented details about these caravanserais, highlighting their significance. The records of these travelers serve as important historical sources in assessing the economic capacity of the Bukhara Emirate and the role of caravanserais in its socio-economic life [8].

Caravanserais in major cities served not only as temporary accommodations for merchants but also as economic centers where wholesale trade was conducted and necessary taxes were collected. Some caravanserais housed craft workshops, enabling

artisans to engage in production activities related to trade. Due to their broad functionality, caravanserais became a significant source of revenue. Typically, each caravanserai chamber accommodated 10 to 15 travelers. However, historical sources provide limited information regarding rental fees and their regulation. According to E.K. Meyendorf, in the early 19th century, the rental fee in caravanserais was 16 rubles. Most caravanserais were constructed using funds allocated through charitable endowments (waqfs), with their earnings distributed to madrasahs, religious scholars, and mosque imams [9].

In the middle to late 19th century, handicraft production played a crucial role in the economy of the Bukhara Emirate. Skilled artisans in Bukhara, Samarkand, Qarshi, Shahrisabz, Khujand, Jizzakh, Karmana, and Gijduvan practiced nearly a hundred different crafts, producing high-quality and exquisite goods. Notable industries included weaving, jewelry-making, gold embroidery, copperwork, wood and plaster carving, pottery, carpentry, blacksmithing, and shoemaking. These products gained recognition not only in domestic markets but also in numerous foreign countries [10].

N.V. Khanikov noted that during the 1840s–1850s, trade between Bukhara and Khiva was relatively weak, with 1,000–1,500 camels transporting goods annually. Khivan merchants imported indigo and green tea from Bukhara and purchased floral-patterned textiles and dyes produced by Indian artisans. Caravan representatives stayed in caravanserais until trade transactions were completed [11].

From the second half of the 19th century, Russia became the leading trade partner of the Bukhara Emirate. The key commercial hubs of Bukhara, Qarshi, and Samarkand played an essential role in external trade relations. Markets and caravanserais in these cities facilitated large-scale purchases of Russian goods. Historical records indicate that annually, 25,000–30,000 camels transported various trade commodities from Russia to Bukhara. In contrast, trade volume with Khiva was approximately 20 times smaller, likely due to greater security along caravan routes and the capacity of Bukhara's caravanserais to store large amounts of goods [12].

The construction of Bukhara's caravanserais adhered to traditional Eastern architectural styles, incorporating the following features:

1. Sturdy walls and tall gates for protection.
2. Inner courtyards and fountains for aesthetic and functional purposes.
3. Thick brick walls to regulate temperature.
4. Separate rooms and storage facilities for merchants.

Numerous caravanserais in Bukhara have retained their historical appearance, continuing to serve as significant landmarks of trade and economic activity. Some of the most famous caravanserais include:

1. Abdullakhan caravanserai – built in the 16th century by Abdullakhan II, this large and well-located caravanserai featured special chambers, storage rooms, and resting areas for merchants [13].

2. Nogay caravanserai – constructed specifically for merchants from Russia and the Nogay market, it facilitated trade in Russian-imported goods during the imperial period.
3. Raboti Malik caravanserai – one of the largest and most fortified caravanserais, located on the Bukhara-Samarkand trade route. Built in the 11th century during the Karakhanid era, its architectural style and robust walls exemplify master craftsmanship [14].
4. Kokaldosh caravanserai – situated next to the Kokaldash madrasa, it served as an essential hub for merchants and travelers. Later, it was converted into a hotel and commercial center.

These caravanserais played a vital role in facilitating regional trade and economic relations, and today they are considered valuable historical and cultural heritage sites.

By the 1880s, there were over 50 large and small markets, each surrounded by caravanserais. Historical sources highlight their significance in foreign trade. Notably, P. Nebolsin documented that Russian caravans stayed at the “Nazarboy Gumbaz” caravanserai, located 50–60 versts from Bukhara. Similarly, in trade with the Kokand Khanate, a designated caravanserai was used. P.I. Demezov recorded that goods from Kokand were delivered to “Yangi Saroyi Barra” caravanserai, from where they were distributed to Bukhara and other cities. This suggests that each region had its own reliable caravanserai in Bukhara.

The increase in the number of caravanserais was directly linked to the growth of trade and commodity exchange. By the early 20th century, Bukhara housed over 60 caravanserais. The expansion of trade volume is evident in the warehouses and storage facilities associated with these caravanserais. Like marketplaces, many caravanserais were specialized in particular types of commerce [15].

Bukhara, as a significant trade center along the ancient Silk Road, played a crucial role in economic and social life, with caravanserais serving as essential commercial hubs. During the 18th–19th centuries, the expansion of trade relations led to a notable increase in the number of caravanserais within the Bukhara Emirate. These structures functioned not only as convenient accommodations and storage facilities for merchants but also as economic centers.

In the second half of the 19th century, Russia became Bukhara’s primary trade partner, resulting in a significant rise in annual trade volume. The caravanserais in Bukhara were characterized by fortified walls, inner courtyards, and warehouses, with each specializing in a particular trade route. By the early 20th century, the city housed over 60 caravanserais, which played a key role in strengthening the emirate’s economic capacity.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The study establishes that caravanserais in the Bukhara Emirate functioned as crucial economic institutions that supported trade, taxation, and merchant accommodation, especially during the 18th to 20th centuries. Their

architectural design and integration into trade routes, particularly with Russia, underscored Bukhara's prominence as a regional commercial center. **Implication :** These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of pre-modern trade infrastructure and its influence on economic development, offering valuable perspectives for historical studies on supply chains, taxation systems, and urban commerce. Moreover, the cultural and architectural heritage of caravanserais underscores the importance of preserving such historical assets and applying their lessons to contemporary economic planning. **Limitation :** However, the study's reliance on historical texts introduces the possibility of bias and gaps, while the scarcity of quantitative economic data and administrative records limits the analysis of operational details such as rental systems and financial governance. **Future Research :** Further research should involve comparative studies across Central Asia, integration of archaeological data, and digital mapping of trade routes. These efforts could provide enhanced insights into the structural, economic, and logistical significance of caravanserais within broader transregional trade networks.

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