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### **Abstract**

This article analyzes the historical development of ancient urban civilizations formed in Central Asia and their significance in modern society based on scientific sources and archaeological research. The study examines the emergence of ancient cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm, Termez, and Merv, their economic development, roles in trade relations, and importance as centers of science and culture. Archaeological excavations and historical written sources demonstrate that developed irrigation systems, craft production, and trade infrastructure had already been formed in these regions from pre-Christian times.

In particular, trade routes of the Great Silk Road played a crucial role in the economic and cultural development of cities. Research results indicate that the development of ancient urban culture in Central Asia confirms that the region served for centuries as a center of international trade, scientific exchange, and cultural integration. Therefore, comprehensive scientific study, preservation, and transmission of historical cities to future generations remain among the urgent tasks of the present time.

### **Keywords**

Central Asia, ancient cities, urbanization, civilization, archaeology, cultural heritage, Great Silk Road, trade routes, statehood, urban planning, irrigation systems, economic centers, craftsmanship, historical sources, Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm, Termez, cultural exchange, migration, scientific centers, religious tolerance, historical memory, urban culture, economic development, cultural tourism, historical monuments, archaeological research, urban infrastructure, heritage preservation.

### **Introduction**

Central Asia is one of the most ancient centers of human civilization, and the urban culture formed in this region played a significant role in the development of economic, cultural, and scientific relations between East and West. Early agricultural societies that emerged in the Amu Darya and Syr Darya basins during the 2nd–1st millennia BCE gradually transformed into large settlements and later into cities surrounded by strong defensive walls. Archaeological research shows that urban culture in this region

developed almost simultaneously with the civilizations of Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and China.

The development of irrigation systems, expansion of craft production, and formation of trade routes accelerated urban growth. Especially the emergence of the Great Silk Road turned Central Asian cities into international trade centers and integrated the region into global economic networks. Cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm, and Merv became not only trade hubs but also important centers of science, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and philosophy, proving their significance as intellectual centers.

Recent archaeological studies confirm the existence of sewage systems, water distribution networks, public buildings, markets, and production workshops in ancient cities, indicating the presence of advanced urban management systems. Today, this historical heritage plays an important role in cultural tourism, scientific research, and strengthening national identity. Moreover, ancient irrigation and urban planning experiences are also valuable for addressing modern ecological challenges. Therefore, studying ancient urban civilizations of Central Asia remains relevant both for understanding historical processes and for developing modern urban development strategies.

## **Main Part**

The formation of urban culture in Central Asia resulted from long-term socio-economic processes. Archaeological findings, ancient written sources, and modern scientific studies show that urbanization in the region developed gradually, with natural-geographical conditions, economic activities, and trade relations playing decisive roles. Researchers emphasize that three main factors significantly influenced the emergence of cities.

The first important factor was the development of irrigated agriculture. Artificial irrigation systems were established early in the Amu Darya and Syr Darya basins, enabling stable food production. Excavated ancient canals, water distribution facilities, and agricultural tools demonstrate that irrigation systems were already widely developed during the 2nd–1st millennia BCE. Increased agricultural productivity produced surplus goods, allowing part of the population to engage in crafts and trade rather than farming. As a result, large settlements appeared and gradually evolved into cities.

The second key factor was the formation of trade routes. Central Asia historically served as a geographical bridge connecting East and West, where caravan routes facilitated economic and cultural exchanges among civilizations. With the establishment of the Great Silk Road, cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Merv, and Termez became international trade centers. Silk, metal goods, spices, precious stones, and craft products

were exchanged along these routes. Caravanserais, markets, and craft centers were built along trade roads, strengthening urban economies.

The third major factor was the development of crafts and production. Archaeological findings indicate that pottery, metallurgy, weaving, jewelry-making, and weapon production were well developed in ancient cities. Craft products satisfied local demand and were also exported to distant regions, increasing cities' economic power and population growth. According to scientific estimates, more than 200 large and medium settlements existed in the Amu Darya basin during the first millennium BCE. Most possessed defensive walls, developed irrigation systems, and trade infrastructure. Some later transformed into major urban centers.

Thus, the combined development of agriculture, trade, and crafts formed the foundation of urban civilization in Central Asia and created a strong basis for economic and cultural development in subsequent centuries.

### Population and Urbanization Indicators of Central Asian Cities

City	Population in the 11th–12th centuries (approx.)	Status of Major Cities at the Time
Samarkand	120–150 thousand	Major trade and scientific center
Bukhara	80–100 thousand	Religious and cultural center
Merv	Over 150 thousand	One of the largest cities of the Near East
Urgench	70–90 thousand	Trade center
Termez	40–60 thousand	Border trade city

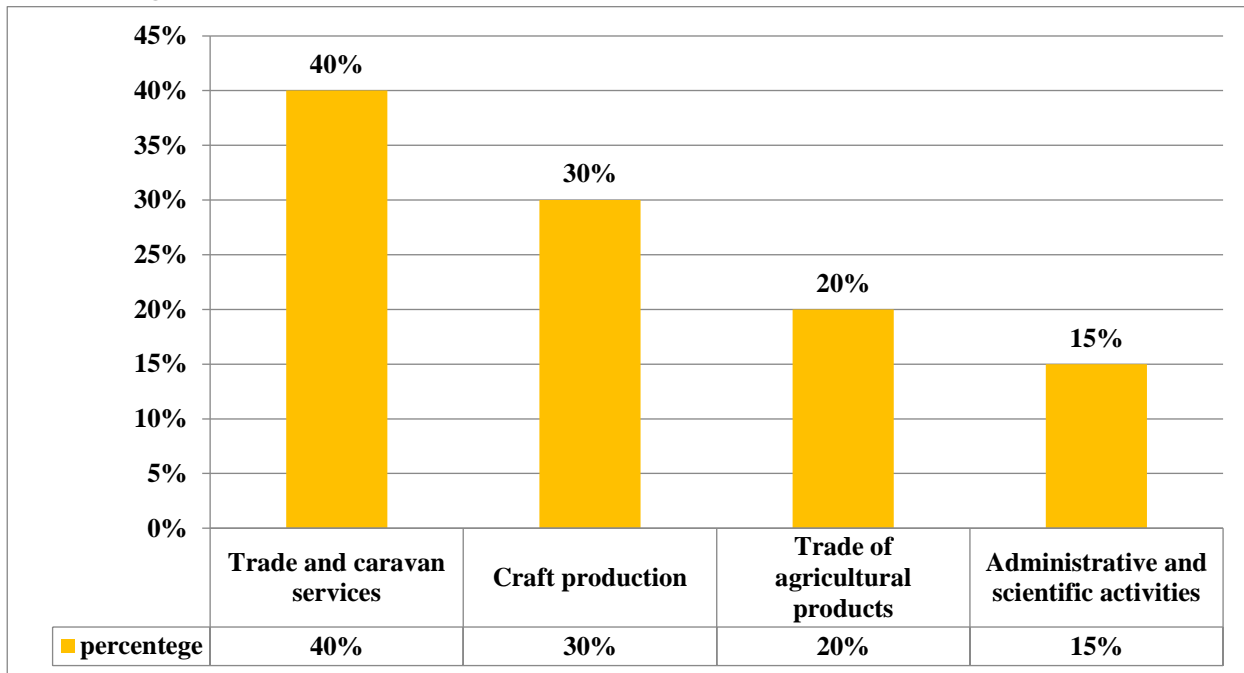
The table illustrates the scale of urban development in major Central Asian cities during the 11th–12th centuries, showing that the region was home to several large and influential urban centers.

Samarkand, with an estimated population of 120–150 thousand people, stood out as a major center of trade and science, playing a key role in intellectual and commercial exchanges across the region. Bukhara, whose population ranged between 80–100 thousand, functioned primarily as a religious and cultural hub, attracting scholars, students, and merchants from different areas.

Merv was one of the largest cities not only in Central Asia but also in the broader Near East, with a population exceeding 150 thousand, demonstrating its significance as a

political, economic, and cultural center. Urgench, with 70–90 thousand inhabitants, developed as an important trade city, benefiting from its strategic location along major trade routes. Meanwhile, Termez, home to approximately 40–60 thousand people, served as a border trade city, facilitating commerce and interaction between regions.

According to some studies, by the 12th century the share of urban population in certain regions reached 30%.



## Indicators of the performance of economic hubs in certain sectors of cities in Central Asia

In the context of contemporary globalization, ancient historical cities of Central Asia are becoming not only cultural heritage sites but also important resources for socio-economic development. Scientific and economic analyses show that effective utilization of historical cities significantly contributes to sustainable regional development. Today, the importance of historical cities manifests in several major directions.

Historical cities are key pillars of the tourism industry. Cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva are among the most visited destinations in international tourism. Tourism development expands hotel, transport, trade, craft, and service sectors, creating thousands of new jobs. Statistical observations indicate that the number of foreign tourists visiting the region has multiplied over the past decade.

Historical cities serve as a means of preserving national culture and historical memory. Monuments, ancient streets, and cultural environments help people recognize their historical identity. Their role is especially significant in educating younger generations in the spirit of historical heritage.

Historical cities are also important objects for international scientific research. Ongoing studies in archaeology, history, architecture, anthropology, and urban studies lead to new scientific conclusions. Numerous international expeditions conduct research in historical regions every year.

Historical cities are becoming strategic resources for regional economic development. Restoration of historical centers, development of tourism infrastructure, and organization of cultural events increase regional economic activity.

Statistical data indicate that growth in tourist visits to historical cities has increased employment in service sectors, enhancing the economic effectiveness of historical heritage.

Thus, historical cities are increasingly strengthening their role as key drivers of economic, cultural, and scientific development in modern society.

## **Conclusion**

The formation of ancient urban civilizations in Central Asia was closely connected with natural-geographical conditions, development of irrigated agriculture, functioning of trade routes, and expansion of craft production. Early urban centers formed in the Amu Darya and Syr Darya basins gradually evolved into major political, economic, and cultural centers. Archaeological excavations, written sources, and modern research confirm the existence of developed infrastructure, irrigation systems, trade markets, and craft centers in Central Asian cities.

Ancient cities served not only as trade and production centers but also as environments where science, culture, and religious tolerance flourished. Scholars and thinkers originating from Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm, and other cities made significant contributions to world science, demonstrating that Central Asia was one of the major international scientific and cultural centers of the medieval period.

In modern times, historical cities are becoming important factors of economic, cultural, and tourism potential. Preservation, restoration, and international promotion of heritage sites have become key directions of regional development strategies. Growth in tourism, service sectors, and cultural industries contributes to increasing economic activity. Moreover, experiences of ancient cities may provide scientific foundations for solving modern urbanization challenges, particularly in rational water resource management, ecological sustainability, and preservation of historical environments.

In conclusion, ancient urban civilization in Central Asia represents not only historical heritage but also an important factor for contemporary socio-economic and cultural development. Therefore, in-depth study, scientific analysis, and transmission of this heritage to future generations remain among the key tasks of modern historiography.

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