



Persian Literature and Cultural Life in Central Asia: From Civilizational Roots to the Reform Movements in Bukhara (Late Nineteenth Century – Early Twentieth Century)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformation of Persian literary and cultural life in Bukhara and its wider Central Asian environment from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, with particular attention to the relationship between literature, education, literacy, journalism, and cultural identity. Rather than treating literary modernization as an exclusively aesthetic development, the study approaches it as part of a wider transformation in the production, circulation, and social function of knowledge. It argues that the reformist turn associated with Ahmad Donish and subsequently developed by Sadriddin Ayni and other Jadid intellectuals redefined the role of Persian literary culture: literature increasingly addressed social conditions, educational limitations, injustice, and intellectual reform, while newspapers, new-method schools, textbooks, and accessible literary styles expanded the potential readership of reformist ideas. The study also examines Russian colonial rule without reducing the period to a simple opposition between Islam and modernity. Drawing on Persian, Tajik, Arabic, Russian, and English-language sources, it shows that educational and literary reform emerged through a complex interaction between inherited Islamic scholarly traditions, local intellectual initiatives, and new forms of knowledge circulating across the Muslim world. The article concludes that the modernization of Persian literary culture in Bukhara was inseparable from attempts to broaden access to knowledge and reshape cultural identity, making literature an important medium of educational and social transformation.



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1. Introduction

Culture and literature are the living mirrors that reflect the lives of peoples and the nature of the social and intellectual conditions of nations, contributing to clarifying the components of society and its authentic values. Culture is concerned with all aspects of life—religious, cognitive, behavioral, political, and economic—illustrating the changes they undergo across ages (Verhelst, 1990, p. 17). Literature stands out as an expressive tongue that uses the magic of words in poetry and prose to articulate and interpret the surrounding world, creating a dialogic relationship between the writer and the recipient that reflects the events of the author's era (Sutherland, 2018, p. 11).

In this context, Persian literature, with its 1,300-year history, plays a major role in presenting the history and lives of Asian and Islamic peoples. Persian is not only the official language in Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, but it is also spoken by millions across a much wider area, including Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, India, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Iraq — regions that have undergone major transformations across the centuries, giving Persian literature immense significance in documenting the lives of these peoples across various eras (Anusha, 2001, p. 2).

Despite the breadth of existing scholarship on Persian literary history in Central Asia and on the Jadid reform movement considered separately, relatively few accounts bring together the literary-historical and the socio-educational strands of this transformation within a single, integrated narrative that treats poetry, the press, historiography, and religious reform as interconnected facets of one reformist project (see Section 2). This study addresses that gap by asking: (1) how did the transformation of Persian literary culture in Bukhara between the 1860s and 1917 relate to parallel developments in education, journalism, and religious reform; (2) what role did Russian colonial policy play in shaping — without wholly determining — this transformation; and (3) how did the two successive generations of reformers, associated respectively with Ahmad Donish and Sadriddin Ayni, differ in their strategies and impact? These questions are examined through the qualitative, cross-linguistic historiographical approach set out in Section 4.

2. Literature Review

The scholarship most directly relevant to this study falls into three broad, and only partially overlapping, strands. The first is literary-historical: encyclopaedic and literary-critical works such as Anusha's (2001) survey of Persian

literature in Central Asia and Bečka's (n.d.) history of Persian literature in Tajikistan document the region's major authors and literary movements, but treat the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reform period largely as a coda to a much longer literary history, with comparatively little attention to its institutional or media context.

The second strand concerns the political and educational history of the Jadid movement. Mosalmanian Qobadiani (n.d.) and Hadizadeh (1993) reconstruct the biography and reform proposals of Ahmad Donish and situate the movement within Bukharan court politics, while Usmonov and Davronov (2008) and Raeesnia (2006) document the growth of the Central Asian and Tajik press. Recent scholarship continues to extend this strand: Gofurovich (2024), for instance, catalogues individual new-method schools opened in Bukhara between 1908 and 1912, corroborating — from an independent, present-day pedagogical-history perspective — the broader picture of rapid educational expansion also traced in this study (Section 5.4.3). Such studies, however, tend to treat schooling, the press, and literary production as separate institutional histories rather than as expressions of a single cultural transformation.

The third strand concerns Russian colonial policy in Turkestan and the Muslim response to it. Sources such as Agafonov (1906) and Raeesnia (2006) document the activities of Russian administrators and missionary-linked educators such as Ilminsky and Ostroumov, while Khalid (1998) offers a more analytically developed English-language account of Jadidism as a movement of Muslim cultural reform across Russian Turkestan, including the role religious scholars played in mobilizing resistance to Russian expansion; but — reflecting the period and provenance of much of this material — they vary considerably in the critical distance they take from either the colonial administration or its Jadid and religious opponents. Later Tajik historiography, including Ayni's (1926) own writings, is a rich primary source for the reformist perspective but is not a neutral secondary account of it, since Ayni was simultaneously a participant in, and a leading interpreter of, the movement he describes.

Taken together, this literature supplies the empirical building blocks — biographical, institutional, and literary — for a history of reform in Bukhara, but does not, on its own, connect these blocks into an account of how literary change, educational expansion, print culture, and religious debate functioned as facets of a single reformist transformation. It is this integrative gap that the present study addresses, while remaining attentive to the fact that

several of its principal secondary sources — particularly Ayni (1926) and related Tajik-language historiography from the same period — are not disinterested observers of the events they describe.

3. Purpose / Objectives of the Study

Building on the problem outlined above, this study pursues three specific objectives:

- To trace the continuity and points of rupture in Persian literary production in Bukhara and wider Central Asia, from its pre-Jadid roots to the reform period (late 19th–early 20th century).
- To examine how two interconnected phases of intellectual and educational reform—the pre-Jadid reformism associated with Ahmad Donish and the organized Jadid reform movement represented by Sadriddin Ayni and his contemporaries—employed literature, journalism, and new-method education as complementary instruments of cultural and social reform.
- To situate this reform movement in relation to Russian colonial policy, without treating the period as a simple binary opposition between a colonial/secularizing project and a religious/traditionalist resistance.

These objectives directly inform the research questions stated in Section 1 and the analytical structure adopted in Section 4.

4. Methodology / Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative, historiographical research design combining textual-literary analysis with thematic historical synthesis. It does not rely on newly collected archival or field data; rather, it constructs an integrated account from a purposive sample of published primary and secondary sources in five languages: Persian, Tajik, Arabic, Russian, and English.

4.1. Source selection criteria

Sources were selected on the basis of (a) direct relevance to Persian literary, educational, journalistic, or religious life in Bukhara and Turkestan between approximately 1860 and 1920; (b) authorship by, or close documentary proximity to, the historical actors discussed (e.g., Ayni's own memoirs and histories); and (c) the availability of secondary scholarly synthesis in encyclopaedic or monographic form (e.g., Anusha, 2001; Bečka, n.d.) that could be cross-checked against more specialized studies.

4.2. Primary and secondary sources

Primary materials include literary and political works produced by the reformers themselves — for instance, Ayni's (1926) *Sample of Tajik Literature* and his memoir

literature — together with period press titles referenced in the secondary literature (Bukhara-yi Sharif, Ayina, Turan, Sada-yi Turkestan). Secondary materials comprise historical and literary-encyclopaedic scholarship in Persian, Arabic, Russian, and English, including older syntheses (e.g., Pirnia, 1932; Barthold, n.d.) and more recent scholarship (e.g., Gofurovich, 2024) used to corroborate or update specific claims.

4.3. Periodization rationale

The reform period is divided into two stages — a 'Cognitive Inception Stage' (c. 1860–1905) and a 'Renewers Stage' (1905–1917) — following the periodization used in the Tajik- and Persian-language secondary literature (Mosalmanian Qobadiani, n.d.; Hadizadeh, 1993). The break at 1905 reflects both an internal turning point (the transition from Donish's largely individual reform proposals to a broader, organized Jadid movement led by Ayni, Fitrat, and Behbudi) and an external one (the loosening of restrictions on the Muslim press across the Russian Empire following the 1905 Revolution, which several of the sources used here associate with the expansion of Central Asian Jadid journalism).

4.4. Analytical approach

Within this periodization, sources were analysed thematically across four domains — poetry, journalism, historiography/science, and religious reform — to trace how each domain registered the broader reformist transformation. Claims appearing in only a single source, particularly where that source was produced by a participant in the events described (e.g., Ayni, 1926), are flagged in Section 6 as requiring independent corroboration.

4.5. Handling of multilingual sources

Where a claim could be cross-referenced across more than one linguistic tradition — for example, the account of Ostroumov's role at the Wilayat-i Turkestan newspaper, drawn from both an Arabic-language secondary source (Raeesnia, 2006) and a Russian-language source — this is noted in the text. Where cross-referencing was not possible within the scope of this study, this is acknowledged as a limitation rather than presented as settled fact.

4.6. Limitations of the approach

Because this study relies on published secondary syntheses rather than original archival research, and because a substantial share of the Tajik- and Persian-language historiography used here — most notably Ayni's own writings — was produced by, or shortly after, the

very reform movement it documents, the account of Russian colonial policy and of 'cultural decline' offered in Section 5 should be read as reflecting the historiographical perspective available in these sources rather than as a fully adjudicated, multi-perspectival judgment.

5. Findings / Results

5.1. Historical Roots and the Impact of Persian Literature in Central Asia

Central Asia – known to Muslim geographers as *Ma Wara' al-Nahr* (Transoxiana, "the land beyond the river") and, because of the Turkic peoples who came to inhabit much of it (Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen), as *Turkestan* – is a landlocked region at the heart of the Asian continent, extending from China in the east to the Caspian Sea and Iran in the west (Yaqut al-Hamawi, 1977, vol. 1, p. 353; Al-Sayyid, 2015, p. 50; Al-Tarazi, 2010, p. 32). Alongside its Turkic-speaking peoples, the region has long been home to the Persian-descended Tajiks. The name *Turkestan* remained in use until 1924 CE, when Soviet Russia abolished it and divided the region into the constituent republics of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan (Al-Tarazi, 2010, p. 368).

Central Asia is home to a rich cultural and civilizational heritage extending back thousands of years, and its history is generally traced to well before the Common Era: some sources place the region's earliest history in the Palaeolithic period, citing traces of human habitation in its coastal areas dating back some 150,000 to 200,000 years (Gafurov, 1983, p. 14). Archaeological findings in the Fergana Valley and surrounding areas indicate that the ancestors of today's Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmen settled the region some five to six thousand years ago and had developed irrigated agriculture; by roughly 3,500 to 4,000 years ago, large and small cities had emerged alongside developing agriculture, crafts, and trade. In the final centuries of the second millennium and the early centuries of the first millennium BCE, Indo-European peoples migrated toward the Zagros Mountains and, in the early seventh century BCE, founded the Aryan Median state, settling in what are now Azerbaijan and Kurdistan; by the mid-sixth century BCE, Median rule extended into the eastern part of Asia Minor, reaching the borders of Central Asia, until King Cyrus, founder of the Achaemenid state (550–330 BCE), defeated the Medes in 550 BCE and annexed the region to the Persian state (Jalilian, 2017, p. 135; Pirnia, 2013, pp. 158, 223; Gafurov, 1983, p. 90). During the fourth and third centuries BCE, the nomadic tribes of Central Asia, from north to east as

far as the Tian Shan range west of China, came under the dominance of the Massagetae, a Saka people of mixed but predominantly Aryan descent who are credited in the sources with having killed Cyrus himself in battle (Pirnia, 2013, pp. 166, 242). Despite being landlocked – a feature that has led some scholars to describe it as a kind of 'black hole' that powers entering it find hard to leave (Frank, 1992, p. 51) – the region's abundant resources and its position at the center of the Silk Road, linking East and West, drew the attention of successive empires throughout its history.

With the rise of the early Islamic conquests under Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab (r. 634–644), Muslim ambitions increasingly turned toward Central Asia, particularly after the fall of the Sasanian state (224–652) and the extension of Muslim authority over much of Iran. Conquest armies began advancing into the region under Caliph Uthman ibn Affan (r. 644–655) and, subsequently, under Umayyad commanders (661–750); the earliest attempts, led by Al-Ahnaf ibn Qais and Abdullah ibn Amir, reached Khorasan and Transoxiana in 651 CE, though a stable Islamic presence was not established until later in the Umayyad period. When the commander Qutayba ibn Muslim al-Bahili took up the governorship of Khorasan in 704 CE, he judged that tribal rivalries within the Muslim army, rather than local resistance, were the principal obstacle to consolidating Islam's foothold; having resolved these disputes, he went on to conquer a number of Central Asia's major cities, among them Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khwarazm (Akram, n.d., pp. 85–86). Aware of the region's strategic importance, Qutayba sought to root Islam more deeply among its people: after taking Bukhara, he found that many residents outwardly professed Islam while privately continuing older devotional practices, and he is credited with strengthening ties between Muslims and the local population – reportedly requiring Bukharans to share half of their homes with Arab settlers so that the two communities would live side by side – while enforcing Islamic law and building mosques (Al-Narshakhi, 1965, p. 77; Ibn Kathir, 1991, vol. 5, p. 114). In 751 CE, Arab forces went on to conquer the city of Shash (present-day Tashkent), subduing most of the region's remaining areas and consolidating the spread of Islam across Central Asia (Akram, n.d., p. 86). The literature attributes much of the sincerity of local conversion to the conduct of the Muslim conquerors themselves: the people of Balkh are recorded as having welcomed Qutayba, and a substantial number of Bukharans are said to have embraced Islam out of genuine conviction after Qutayba defeated their ruling queen and, in the peace that followed, assured her that

the Muslims had not come to occupy Bukhara but to convey the message of Islam (Sultan, 2005, pp. 43–44).

After this, the region entered a golden age: the ninth through twelfth centuries CE are described in the literature as a period of great cultural renaissance, during which mathematics, astronomy, medicine, history, philosophy, grammar, and literature flourished on a wide scale. Following the fall of the Umayyad state, the Abbasid state (750–1258) that succeeded it saw its authority over the region weaken within about a century amid dynastic conflict and movements for Persian autonomy, giving rise to a succession of nominally subordinate but effectively independent Persian dynasties that ruled Transoxiana in turn: the Tahirids (821–873), the Saffarids (867–899), the Samanids (874–999), the Ghaznavids (962–1201), the Seljuks (1037–1157), and the Khwarazmshahs (1187–1245) (Al-Ashmawi, 1992, pp. 159, 167, 197). Throughout these successive dynasties, Turkestan's cities retained their reputation as strongholds of learning, each associated with its own scholars. Bukhara — whose name is said to derive from a word meaning 'abundant knowledge' — produced the hadith scholar Imam Muhammad al-Bukhari (810–870), author of *Sahih al-Bukhari*; the physician-philosopher Ibn Sina (980–1037), whose *Canon of Medicine* remained a standard medical reference for centuries; and the jurist Ubaydullah ibn Mas'ud al-Mahbubi al-Bukhari (d. 1346). Before the Soviet era, the city reportedly held 197 mosques and 167 religious madrasas, of which the Maghak-i Attari mosque and the Ulugh Beg (1417) and Mir-i-Arab (1535) madrasas survive (Al-Zirikli, 1986; Al-Khund, 2005, vol. 2, p. 113). Samarkand, held by some to be the oldest city in Central Asia and, like Bukhara, a major hub on the Silk Road, produced the Qur'anic exegete Abu al-Layth al-Samarqandi (d. 983), the Hanafi jurist Abu Bakr al-Samarqandi (d. 1145), and the physician Abu Hamid al-Samarqandi (martyred in Herat in 1222); its surviving madrasas include the Sher-Dor (1619) and Tilla-Kori (1646). Khwarazm, an oasis on the Amu Darya delta regarded as an ancient cradle of the Aryan peoples, produced the mathematician and astronomer Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi (d. after 847), credited with founding the field of algebra, and the polymath Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (973–1048), described in the literature as among the greatest minds Islamic civilization produced. Termez, on the eastern bank of the Amu Darya, produced the hadith scholars Imam Muhammad al-Tirmidhi (824–892), author of *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, and Muhammad al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi (d. 932) (Al-Zirikli, 1986; Bojnourdi, 2004, vol. 13, pp. 387, 391). Also numbered among the wider scholarly renaissance of this period are the philosopher Al-Farabi (873–950), the

historian Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Narshakhi (899–959), the grammarian Al-Zamakhshari (1075–1144), and Ahmad al-Farghani (d. 850), whose works retained their scholarly value long afterward.

Central Asia has a deep-rooted history of embracing Persian literature specifically, being the birthplace of brilliant poets and writers.

- Prominent literary figures from Central Asia: The region produced literary giants such as Rudaki Samarqandi (d. 952 CE), regarded by researchers as the first poet to compose in Persian across the *qasida*, *ghazal*, *qit'a*, and *ruba'i* forms, and still honored today as one of the sources of pride of the Tajik nation (Ayni, 1926, p. 11).
- Adib Sabir Termezi (d. 1148 CE) (Anusha, 2001, p. 92) and Nizami Aruzi Samarqandi (d. 1165 CE) (Anusha, 2001, p. 935) are also counted among them.
- Other notable figures include Najmuddin Kubra (d. 1221 CE) (Anusha, 2001, p. 910), Sheikh Kamal Khujandi (d. 1393 CE) (Ayni, 1926, p. 74), and Dawlatshah Samarqandi (d. 1495 CE) (Anusha, 2001, p. 424).

The presence of these greats indicates the depth of Persian cultural and linguistic influence, especially in Samarkand and Bukhara, an influence whose roots extend back to pre-Islamic times: the wider region, known in Persian sources as Greater Khorasan, was mentioned in the "Avesta" as "Airyanem Vaejah" (the expanse of the Aryans), and Turks who later settled parts of it were themselves influenced by Persian civilization, embracing Zoroastrianism after their wars with the Sassanids and their seizure of the Gorgan River basin (Barthold, n.d., p. 57; Pirnia, 1932, pp. 616, 618). Because Iranians often taught the tenets of Islam in Persian once the faith had spread, the old Iranian educational system centered on Khorasan became a training ground for prominent scholars, which in turn helped spread the Persian language and culture alongside the religion itself.

The "Silk Road" played a vital role in this cultural connection, acting as a stage for showcasing Iranian culture, art, and language in Asian regions. Through the caravans traversing this route, artisans, artists, and architects transferred their culture to the furthest reaches, mediating between Greek and Chinese civilizations — an exchange visible, for instance, in Greek and Roman religious motifs found among the ruins of Buddhist temples in present-day Pakistan (Foltz, 2006, p. 143). Major libraries were established in cities along the route during the era of the Islamic states specifically to facilitate the exchange of knowledge between Muslim societies and the civilizations of Greece and China, and

the sources consulted here suggest that Persian language and culture had a more visible presence, throughout history, in the cities strung along this road between Bukhara and Kashgar than elsewhere. This is illustrated by an anecdote recorded in the *Golestan* of the Persian poet Sa'di Shirazi (1219–1294), who describes visiting a mosque in Kashgar — now part of Eastern Turkestan and among the easternmost points of the Silk Road — and being asked by the students there to recite verses they already knew and loved, with children reportedly delighting in meeting him once they realized who he was; the anecdote is offered in the literature as evidence of how far Persian language and poetry had traveled and how well they were known even at the road's furthest reaches. Consistent with this, Persian functioned in much of Central Asia as the language of rulers and learning even where local vernaculars remained dominant in daily life, to the point that princes of Turkestan are recorded as having composed poetry in Persian themselves.

This culture left a lasting mark on local Central Asian languages, which are rich in Persian words such as *Nan* (bread), *Darukhaneh* (pharmacy), *Kucha* (alley), *Peighambar* (Prophet), and *Fereshteh* (angel), among dozens of others still used across the languages of the region's peoples. It also influenced architectural styles, as noted above in the mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi (d. 1166 CE), and the influence persists into the present: the funeral prayer intention is reportedly still recited in Persian in a number of Uzbekistan's mosques, and the Kazakh writer Mukhtar Auezov is cited in the literature as attesting that the stories of the *Shahnameh* and *Layli and Majnun* were told among the Kazakhs even while they remained largely illiterate. Persian-language historians are likewise credited with an important role in documenting the history of Central Asia's peoples, particularly between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, through works such as the *Shaybani-nameh* by Kamal al-Din Shir Ali Binai (d. c. 1512). Furthermore, the study and teaching of the Persian language continued to flourish in the universities of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan even after these republics gained independence: Tashkent alone has produced many teachers of Persian, reflecting a long history of instruction there; Persian is reportedly taught at two universities in Turkmenistan and four in Kazakhstan, and at a number of schools and universities in Kyrgyzstan (Sanaei, n.d., pp. 106–107; Darwish, 2004, p. 105; Köprülü, 2006, p. 493).

This civilizational continuity was nonetheless interrupted by episodes of severe disruption, the most consequential of which was the Mongol invasion. Turkestan retained its

standing as a center of learning despite repeated changes of ruling dynasty until the early thirteenth century, when Genghis Khan advanced into Central Asia in 1220 CE and, together with his soldiers, committed what the sources consulted here describe as atrocities against the local population. The chronicler Ibn al-Athir described the invasion of Bukhara as a day of overwhelming weeping among men, women, and children, in which the city's people were scattered and its population subjected to great cruelty, so that Bukhara was left desolate as though it had never existed (Ibn al-Athir, cited in Azab, n.d., p. 37). A Persian verse said to have circulated from that time onward, reportedly recited by a refugee from Bukhara to explain what had happened to his city, survives in the literature as a kind of historical epitaph: “*Amadand o kandand o sokhtand o koshtand o bordand o raftand*” — “they came, they dug, they burned, they killed, they plundered, and they left” (Azab, n.d., p. 40). Following Genghis Khan's death in 1227, his descendants continued to rule Turkestan until 1347, when their state weakened and fragmented; the Timurid dynasty ruled from 1350 to 1490, followed by the Uzbek (Shaybanid) state (1500–1599), credited in the literature with preserving Turkestan's standing after the Timurids. The fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries are regarded as one of the most brilliant periods in Turkestan's history, marked by significant political and scientific developments and by a series of military successes that, at their furthest extent, carried Turkestani rule south as far as the Bay of Bengal, east of India (Akram, n.d., p. 67; Al-Tarazi, 2010, pp. 122, 136).

5.2. Cultural Life in Bukhara and Turkestan and the Repercussions of Russian Colonialism

According to Bečka (n.d., pp. 44–46), the period from roughly the mid-eighteenth century to the nineteenth century preceding the Russian occupation of Turkestan witnessed a marked decline in the scientific and literary arena in the Emirate of Bukhara: rulers were preoccupied with internal conflicts and gave little encouragement to scholars or cultural life, literature was largely restricted to serving the ruling class, and poets were expected to use obscure Sufi symbols, producing weak ghazals intended mainly to flatter rulers and their entourage. Despite this, some poets sought to preserve the banner of Persian literature. These include Muhammad Yaqub Manghiti, a son of Amir Daniyal Bai who, despite his princely status, kept away from political life and rule; he was a poet and historian, wrote under the pen-name ‘Ali’, left a small diwan of some six hundred verses, and authored the general history *Gulshan-i Muluk* (Garden of Kings), covering major events from the era of the Prophet Muhammad down to 1830 CE, the reign of Emir

Nasrullah. Also notable is Junaidullah Makhdom Haziq, known for his satire and hostility toward the Manghit princes, who creatively composed the story of “Yusuf and Zulaikha” in 1823 CE before being killed by Emir Nasrullah between 1830 and 1834. Construction and restoration efforts also halted during this period, leaving schools and historical buildings in a dilapidated state (Bečka, n.d., pp. 44–46).

This cultural and scientific decline, coupled with economic difficulties, created conditions that Russian colonial administrators used to expand their political and cultural presence in the region; several of the Arabic- and Persian-language sources consulted here interpret this expansion as a deliberate attempt to impose Russian thought and culture on the peoples of Turkestan in service of colonial policy. The specific claims made in this literature include the following, and are presented here as reported by these sources rather than as independently verified facts:

- Russian colonial policies: according to Al-Sharif (2012, p. 18), colonial administrators sought to marginalize religious schools and close mosques as part of a broader effort to reduce the influence of Islam.
- The same source reports that scholars were targeted, their biographies distorted, and they were labeled as reactionary and prevented from communicating with the wider Islamic world through travel and Hajj (Al-Sharif, 2012, p. 18).
- The Russians established propaganda newspapers in local languages, such as the Wilayat-i Turkestan newspaper, first published in Tashkent in July 1870 CE by order of the Russian Governor-General of Turkestan and directed by Nikolai Petrovich Ostroumov, a student of the Russian orientalist and missionary Ilminsky (1822–1892) (Raeesnia, 2006, p. 130; Agafonov, 1906, pp. 74–76).
- Proposals to change educational curricula – which had been confined to religious sciences since the sixteenth century – to introduce sciences and cultures aligned with Russian colonial policy met fierce opposition from Turkestan's religious scholars, according to Al-Tarazi (2010, p. 300).

5.3. The Emergence of Renewal Movements in Bukhara

Considering these conflicts, writers and poets in Turkestan during the late 19th century divided into two groups: the conservatives, who maintained classical forms, and the renewers, who led a renaissance movement across two stages.

5.3.1. The Cognitive Inception Stage (1860–1905 CE)

During this period, classical literary forms remained dominant among poets and writers, and the use of Sufi symbolism continued to characterize classical poetry; Emir Abdul Ahad Khan himself composed poetry under the pen-name ‘Ajiz’ and was, according to the literature, the most celebrated poet of this classical strand. Against this backdrop, this reform stage was founded by the polymath Ahmad Makhdom Donish (d. 1897 CE) after he observed the advanced life in St. Petersburg during diplomatic missions. Between 1870 and 1873, Donish presented serious reform proposals to Emir Muzaffar al-Din Khan, including the establishment of a consultative council, ministries, and modern schools; his proposals were rejected, and following his return from his third journey to St. Petersburg in 1873 he was exiled from Bukhara and appointed judge in a remote region. Known as Ma'arif Parvari (Fostering Knowledge), this movement's aims extended beyond eradicating illiteracy and teaching world languages (including Russian) to expanding cultural, trade, and economic relations with other countries, organizing administrative affairs, and defining the rights of workers and farmers.

Pioneers of this stage, beyond Donish himself, included the poet Muhammad Siddiq Hairat (d. 1902), a teacher of the renowned Tajik poet Sadridin Ayni whose poetry emphasized the spread of enlightened ideas and friendship among nations; Sharif Khan Sadr Ziya (1865–1931), who served at the Manghit court and whose home functioned as a literary salon for Bukharan youth seeking renewal and development; and Shamsuddin Makhdom Shahin (d. 1893). Also counted among Donish's followers were Qari Rahmatullah Wadih (1818–1893), Abdul Qadir Khwaja Sauda (1823–1873), Isa Makhdom (1829–1887), and Zulfunun Bukhari (d. early 14th century AH). Unlike predecessors who wrote to appease rulers, these writers tackled social issues and the realities of their time (Mosalmanian Qobadiani, n.d., pp. 111–113; Hadizadeh, 1993, p. 71; Bečka, n.d., pp. 64, 79).

5.3.2. The Renewers Stage (1905–1917 CE)

This stage was led by the Tajik poet and writer Sadridin Ayni (d. 1954 CE), regarded in the literature reviewed here as the pioneer of the renewal school in Persian literature in twentieth-century Central Asia. Ayni was among those most influenced by Ahmad Donish's work, which he credited as the driving force behind his own literary activity; after composing poetry in the manner of court poets using the Bedil style, he wrote a poem in 1913 titled “Mazi wa Hal” (Past and Present), in which he addressed the condition of society and explicitly criticized his own earlier writing. Ayni's advocacy for reform led, according to his own account, to his being flogged –

seventy-five lashes, by order of Emir Alim Khan – and imprisoned, a claim that, consistent with the limitation noted in Section 4.6, rests primarily on Ayni's own retrospective writing. Ayni was among the first to introduce the novel to Persian literature in Turkestan, with works such as *Dokhundah* and *Ghulaman*. He authored the five-volume *Yaddashtha-yi Sadriddin Ayni* (*Memoirs of Sadriddin Ayni*), which reflects the socio-political life of the society, alongside political works such as *Tarikh-i Inqilab-i Fikri dar Bukhara* (*History of the Intellectual Revolution in Bukhara*, 1918) and *Umara-yi Manghitiyya-yi Bukhara* (*The Manghit Emirs of Bukhara*, 1920).

This stage also included a much wider circle of figures beyond Ayni, Mahmud Khoja Behbudiy, and Abdurauf Fitrat – among them Tash Khwaja Amiri, Siddiqi Ajzi, Damla Ikramcha, Sayyid Ahmad Wasli, Mirza Siraj Hakim, Sayyid Reza Alizadeh, Abdul Wahid Munzim, Sayyidjan Makhdom Nazmi, Mirza Hayit Sahba, Hamid Khwaja Mehri, Hamza Hakimzade Niyazi, and Bahruddin Azizi, as well as Mir Yaqub Dawlat, Muhammad Reza Muhyi, Miskin Qilich, Ahmad Khan Ali Tabibi, Mulla Abdul Shukur Sirami, Muhammad Rasul Mirza, Sadriddin Shawkat, Karim Bey Shakir Bey al-Mukhlis Bikami, Bayani, and Sirajuddin Siddiqi (Mosalmanian Qobadiani, n.d., p. 117; Al-Tarazi, n.d., p. 304). Their calls for wide-ranging political reform – chief among them a constitutional government in Bukhara – coincided with the 1905 Revolution in Russia, the 1906 Constitutional Revolution in Iran, and the 1908 Constitutional Revolution in the Ottoman Empire (Al-Tarazi, n.d., p. 304). Their writing was characterized by observance of the basic rules of Persian grammar, avoidance of clumsy or unintelligible artifice, and the use of authentic words and expressions in living use among ordinary people. Among the works produced in this vein are Fitrat's "Hayat wa Ghayat al-Hayat," "Manfa'at," and "Munazara" (1909); Ajzi's "Anjuman-e Arwah," "Mir'at-i Ibrat," "Ganjina-i Hikmat," and "Ayn al-Adab" (early twentieth century); Wasli's "Armaghan-i Dostan" and "Tuhfat al-Ahbab" (1909–1912); Behbudiy's "Alifba-yi Maktab-i Islam" and his play "Padarkush" (1906 and 1916); and Azizi's "Adabiyat-i Milli" (1917), among others (Mosalmanian Qobadiani, n.d., p. 118). They preserved the authenticity of the Persian language while adopting a simple, accessible style. This movement drew fierce opposition from Emir Alim Khan and his entourage, who are reported to have declared its advocates apostates and issued rulings sanctioning their killing; a substantial number of reform advocates were subjected to torture between 1917 and 1918, and some were executed – a tragedy recorded by Ayni himself in *Jallad-i Bukhara*

(*The Executioner of Bukhara*, 1920) (Bečka, n.d., p. 81; Mosalmanian Qobadiani, n.d., pp. 117–118, 123).

5.4. Manifestations of the Reform and Renewal Impact

The renewal movements affected most cultural domains in Bukhara and Turkestan, as set out below.

5.4.1. Poetry

Poetic themes underwent a significant shift, moving from the Indian style (*Sabk-i Hindi*) associated with Bedil Dehlavi and Sufi poetry toward social realism. Ahmad Donish laid the foundation for modern writing by advocating accessible styles, and "folk poetry" – verse passed down orally by commoners and never attributed to a known author, often used to satirize the ruling class and lament post-occupation conditions – emerged alongside it. Researchers of folk literature began collecting and recording this poetry in the 1940s, tracing its oldest surviving examples to the nineteenth century, a period in which it flourished and spread particularly around the popular protests that erupted in Bukhara in 1885; poets associated with this tradition include Mirza Alam Jan Hasrat Hisari, Qudratullah Beg (1824–1914), Mulla Rajab Bari, Fakhri Ramani (d. 1914), Nazar Shah (1850–1910), and Karim Diwana (1878–1916) (Bečka, n.d., pp. 71–72). Sadriddin Ayni broke with classical forms in 1918 CE with *Marsh-i Hurriyat* (*March of Freedom*), a poem free of traditional meter and rhyme, which the sources consulted here date several years before Nima Yushij's modern poetry in Iran (Hamroev & Shernazarov, 2021, p. 53; Bečka, n.d., p. 71); this comparative claim has not been independently cross-checked against Iranian literary-historical scholarship and should be treated as provisional.

5.4.2. Journalism

The establishment of the press was a hallmark of cultural life. *Bukhara-yi Sharif* was published as the first Persian newspaper in Central Asia, with its first issue appearing on 11 March 1912 CE in the historic city of Bukhara; its opening statement of purpose described the newspaper's aim as serving Islam and honoring Bukhara's long history as a home of scholars and a wellspring of learning (Ayni, 1926, p. 550; Usmonov & Davronov, 2008, p. 42). It was followed by the bilingual Persian–Turkish magazine *Ayina* in 1913 CE, which published articles and poetry promoting moral virtue and calling for social and political improvement. Over the following two decades, more than twenty newspapers and magazines were published in an accessible style that denounced injustice and advocated modernization – among them *Turan*, *Sada-yi Turkestan*, *Akhtar*, *Qanun*, *Habl al-Matin*, *Siraj al-Akhbar*, *Chehre Nama*, *Waqt*, *Shura*, *Tarjuman*, *Molla*

Nasreddin, and Sirat al-Mustaqim. Most circulated clandestinely for fear of the rulers or Russian troops, and their reach reportedly extended as far as Afghanistan, Iran, Tatarstan, Azerbaijan, and Egypt (Usmonov & Davronov, 2008, pp. 11, 42; Mosalmanian Qobadiani, n.d., p. 116).

5.4.3. Historiography and Sciences

The fields of historiography and travelogue writing also flourished. Ahmad Donish held a special standing among Bukhara's historians, producing works regarded as primary sources for the history of Bukhara, including *Nawadir al-Waqai*, *Tarjumat Ahwal-i Amir-i Bukhara* (an account of the Manghit emirs), *Hadithi Nadira-i Jiddan*, and *Risala fi Nizam al-Dawla* (on philosophy, ethics, and the socio-political condition and cultural level of Bukhara). Abdul Rahman Tamkin (Talkin) al-Bukhari (d. 1918) authored *Matale al-Fakhir wa Matalib al-Zahir*, a geographical history documenting Bukhara's landmarks and mosques as well as natural disasters that struck Transoxiana. Mirza Abdulazim Sami's *Tuhfat al-Shah* traces the history of the Manghit dynasty from Muhammad Rahim Khan (r. 1757–1759) through the fourteenth year of the reign of Emir Abdul Ahad Khan (i.e., to 1899), and records day-to-day events at court along with the shortcomings of certain princes and officials. The historian Sa'id Muhammad Nasir, who fell out of favor with his father, Emir Muzaffar (r. 1860–1885), left several valuable works on Central Asian history, including *Tuhfat al-Za'irin*, *Kunuz al-Atqiya*, and *Athar al-Salatin*, and most notably *Tahqiq fi Qantarati Bukhara wa Salatiniha wa Umara'iha*, describing Bukhara's landmarks, palaces, mosques, and neighborhoods. The renewal movement is also associated with a revival of neglected sciences such as medicine, mathematics, and astronomy, and the sources consulted report the establishment of 75 modern schools in the Emirate of Bukhara by 1915, teaching geography and mathematics alongside religious studies in direct competition with Russian-run schools, with the explicit aim of training a generation versed in both these subjects and the affairs of the state (Akhmedov & Munavarov, n.d., pp. 382–384). This broader picture of rapid educational expansion is independently corroborated, for the earlier 1908–1912 period specifically, by more recent scholarship documenting individual new-method schools opened in Bukhara, including schools founded by Abdulvohid Burhonov, Ayni himself, and Abul Qasim Saifullazoda (Gofurovich, 2024, pp. 547–549). Travel writing on neighboring Iran, Afghanistan, and the Arabian Peninsula also flourished in this period, including *Ghara'ib al-Akhbar fi Aja'ib al-Asfar* by Qari Rahmatullah al-Bukhari (1818–1893) and *Tuhaf-i Ahl-i Bukhara* by

Mirza Siraj Hakim al-Bukhari (1877–1914), alongside biographical anthologies of poets (*tadhkirat al-shu'ara*) such as Ayni's own *Namuna-i Adabiyat-i Tajik* (Anusha, 2001, p. 713; Ayni, 1926, p. 344; Akhmedov & Munavarov, n.d., p. 384).

5.4.4. Religious Reform Movements and the Stance of Scholars

Religious scholars occupied a wide range of positions and were far from unanimous in their response to reform. Islamic scholarship had deep roots in the region — Bukhara and the wider area are associated with, among others, the hadith scholars al-Bukhari and Muslim — and religious scholars are described in the sources consulted as having played a prominent role in resisting Russian expansion, helping to mobilize local resistance in defense of religion and identity in the late nineteenth century (Khalid, 1998, p. 157). At the same time, a minority described in these sources as fanatical opposed the reform movement outright, for reasons the literature attributes to loyalty to the Manghit court — which reformers openly criticized — and to fear that unfamiliar new ideas, arriving alongside Russian efforts to impose its own culture, might be irreligious or aimed at eroding Turkestani identity (Gafurov, n.d., p. 276). Other scholars actively supported reform: a movement termed “Religious Renewal and Reform” emerged, associated with figures such as Abu Nasr Qursawi, Shihabuddin Marjani (1818–1899), and Abdul Qayyum Nasiri (1825–1902), who sought to rid religious sciences of superstition and stagnation, apply reasoning to the understanding of texts, reject blind imitation, and engage in jurisprudential reasoning (*ijtihad*) to address contemporary political and social developments. Taken together, the sources consulted here caution against describing Central Asia's religious scholars as a body opposed to renewal, or as reactionary; where opposition did occur, it is presented in this literature as attributable to specific fears — of losing religion amid Russian pressure, or of the ruling court — rather than to a general hostility toward reform as such. This range of positions is itself evidence against reducing the reform period to a simple binary between Islam and modernity, a point developed further in Section 6.

6. Discussion

Read together, the findings presented in Section 5 support the study's central argument that literary change in reform-era Bukhara cannot be separated from the concurrent transformation of education, print culture, and religious debate (Objective 2). The shift from Sabk-i Hindi and courtly panegyric toward socially engaged poetry (5.4.1), the rapid growth of the periodical press

after 1912 (5.4.2), and the expansion of new-method schooling documented both in the older secondary literature and in more recent scholarship such as Gofurovich (2024) (5.4.3) appear, across the sources consulted, as parallel and mutually reinforcing developments rather than isolated trends.

At the same time, the findings should be read with the caveats set out in Section 4.6. The characterization of the pre-reform period as one of unambiguous 'decline' (5.2) rests primarily on Bečka (n.d.) and related literary-historical sources that draw substantially on the retrospective judgments of the reformers they describe; an account grounded more heavily in court chronicles or economic history might qualify this picture. Similarly, the framing of Russian colonial policy as a coherent project to 'uproot Islam' (5.2) reflects the interpretation offered in Al-Sharif (2012) and related sources; other historiographical traditions have emphasized the more uneven and locally negotiated character of Russian administrative practice in Turkestan, and this study does not have the comparative source base to adjudicate between these readings. Consistent with Objective 3, the analysis therefore treats Russian colonial rule as a significant but not monolithic contextual factor, and it explicitly declines to reduce the reform period to a binary opposition between colonial modernity and religious tradition — a simplification that the findings on religious reform movements themselves (5.4.4) argue against, since religious scholars are shown here to have occupied a range of positions from opposition to active reformist leadership.

Finally, the study's reliance on Ayni's own writings (1926) as both a primary source for, and a leading secondary interpreter of, the Renewers Stage (5.3.2) is a limitation acknowledged directly in Section 4.6. Where Ayni's account of the scale of persecution faced by reformers is not independently corroborated in the sources consulted here, this is noted as an area for further verification rather than presented as an uncontested finding.

7. Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

In response to the research questions posed in Section 1, this study finds that the transformation of Persian literary culture in Bukhara between the 1860s and 1917 was closely interwoven with parallel developments in education, journalism, and religious debate (RQ₁); that Russian colonial policy formed an important, though not the sole or uniformly determining, backdrop to this transformation (RQ₂); and that the movement's two successive generations — associated respectively with Ahmad Donish's individual reform proposals and

Sadriddin Ayni's more organized and overtly political Jadid activism — differed markedly in strategy, institutional reach, and the risks their leading figures were willing to take (RQ₃).

The study's principal contribution is to bring together literary-historical, educational, and print-culture evidence that is more often treated separately in the existing literature, within a single account organized around an explicit periodization and a transparent discussion of source limitations.

Its principal limitations are those noted in Sections 4.6 and 6: reliance on published secondary syntheses rather than original archival research; heavy dependence, for the Renewers Stage in particular, on sources produced by participants in the events described; and two reference-list entries that still require their year and place of publication (see Section 8). For these reasons, the claims made here regarding the character of Russian colonial policy and of the pre-reform 'decline' should be understood as reflecting the balance of the consulted literature rather than as definitively settled.

Future research could usefully extend this study through original archival work in Uzbek, Tajik, and Russian state archives; through closer comparison with contemporaneous reform (Mashrutiyat-era) movements in Iran, to which this study alludes only briefly; and through attention to dimensions — notably the role of women and of oral/folk culture beyond the brief mention in Section 5.4.1 — that lie beyond the scope of the present, primarily literary-historical, account.

8. References

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