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HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF LIBRARIANSHIP IN THE SAMARKAND REGION DURING THE SOVIET PERIOD (1917–1991)

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Abstract: This paper explores the historical development of librarianship and library institutions in the Samarkand region of Uzbekistan during the Soviet period (1917–1991), offering a comparative overview with other regions of the Uzbek SSR. It highlights key phases in library expansion, the institutionalization of educational libraries, children's library systems, and the professionalization of librarianship. Through archival sources, historical newspapers, and scholarly studies, the paper analyzes how Samarkand emerged as a key regional hub for library innovation in Soviet Central Asia.

Keywords: Samarkand, Soviet Union, library history, Uzbekistan, librarianship, comparative analysis

1. Introduction

During the Soviet era, Uzbekistan's library system underwent radical reforms aimed at eliminating illiteracy and disseminating ideology. Samarkand, with its rich history, emerged as a regional center of library development. The library system under Soviet rule was not only an educational instrument but also a political tool. Libraries were required to stock Marxist-Leninist materials and promote party ideologies. In Samarkand, these developments integrated with the local traditions of manuscript preservation and madrasah-based learning.

2. Early Formation (1917–1930s)

People's libraries were formed using confiscated collections. In the 1920s, literacy campaigns led to the creation of rural reading rooms across Samarkand. By 1930, Samarkand had several functioning reading rooms, often coordinated by cultural departments or educational commissariats. Reports from the period indicate a rise in demand for materials in Uzbek and Russian, and active campaigns encouraged rural populations to engage with print culture.

3. Institutional Expansion (1940s–1960s)

WWII and post-war needs boosted academic libraries, including Samarkand State University Library and the Ulughbek Scientific Library. Samarkand stood out for its multilingual collections. The university library collections grew rapidly, particularly in the sciences, history, and philosophy. The Ulughbek Library became a center for Oriental studies, archiving hundreds of Persian, Arabic, and Turkic manuscripts. Government investment led to the creation of rural bibliobus services.



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4. Children's Libraries and Cultural Policy (1950s–1980s)

District-level children's libraries promoted literacy and cultural participation through multilingual books, events, and reader competitions. These libraries worked closely with schools, the Young Pioneer organization, and youth clubs. They provided not only access to literature but also educational programs, story hours, puppet theaters, and mobile library services, especially during the summer months.

5. Professionalization and Methodology (1970s–1991)

Samarkand State University trained librarians and developed curricula. Local methodological manuals shaped library practices across the region. Professional librarians from Samarkand attended national conferences in Tashkent and Moscow. The curriculum at Samarkand State University included courses on cataloging, bibliography, and user engagement, aligned with the standards of the Soviet library system.

6. Comparative Perspective

While Tashkent led in centralization, Samarkand balanced access, diversity, and professional development better than most regions. Regions like Khorezm and Surkhandarya lagged behind Samarkand in professional training and access to multilingual collections. However, Tashkent maintained its dominance due to hosting the national library and centralized methodological resources.

7. Conclusion

Samarkand's Soviet-era library evolution—from grassroots efforts to professional institutions—demonstrates its lasting regional influence. The Samarkand library system's legacy is reflected today in its robust infrastructure and commitment to multilingual and multicultural access. It laid the groundwork for post-independence reforms and serves as a case study in regional adaptation of national policy.

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