

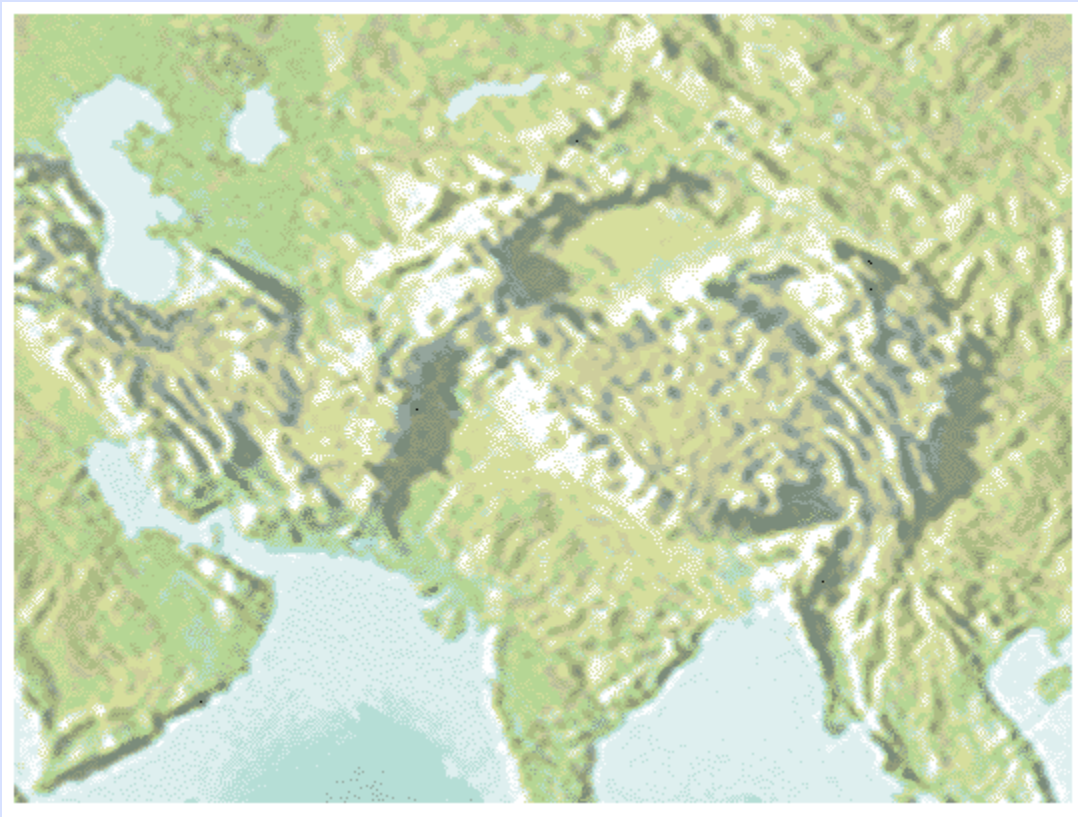
Tajik Ethnicity in Historical Perspective¹

Dedicated to the memory of Dr. Muhammad Osemi

by

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Introduction

The present study is part of an ongoing project on aspects of Tajik identity. It views Tajik ethnicity diachronically as well as synchronically. As part of its diachronic exploration, it

¹ This paper was delivered for the first time at the conference on Society, Language, and Culture in Post-Communist Russia, the Other Former Republics of the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe, Texas Tech University, April 1998.

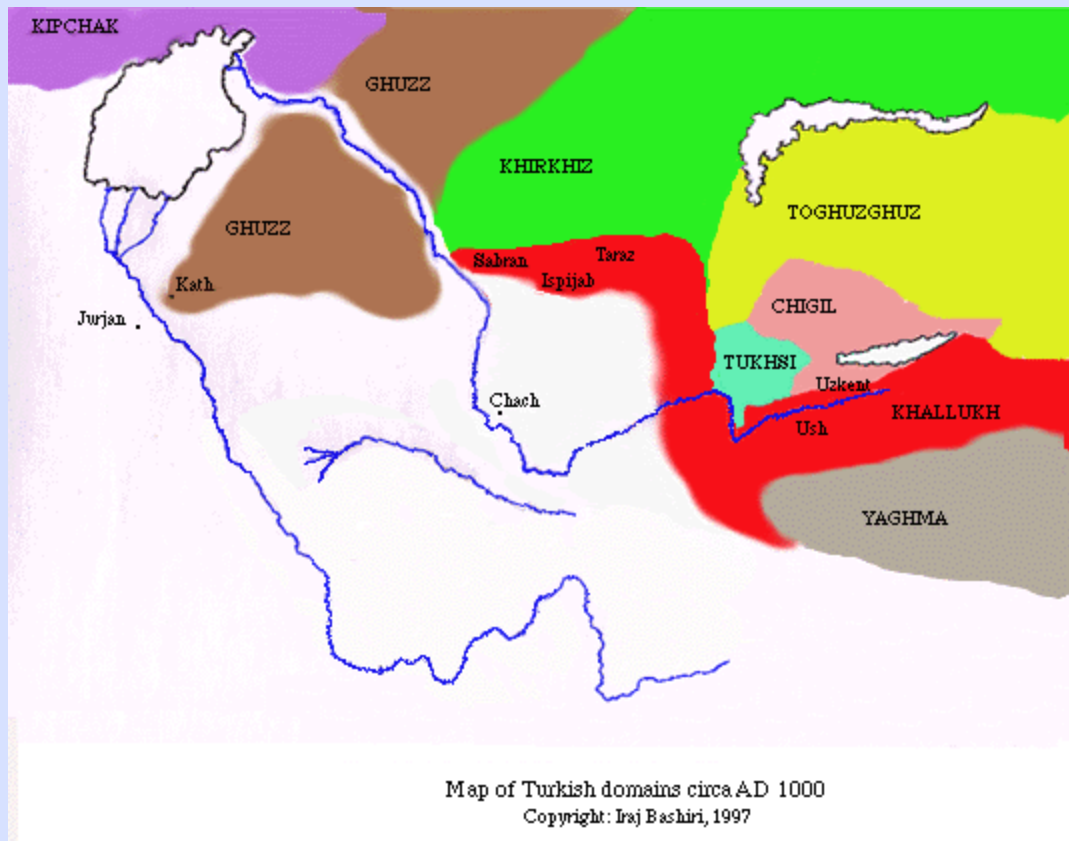
examines the Central Asian documents of the time, notably *Hudud al-'Alam*. It also examines Ibn Howqal's *Surat al-Arz*, Clavijo's account of his journey to Samarqand, and the reports of early Russian explorers detailing the involvement of the Turks in the region before the advent of the Soviets. The synchronic exploration deals with the dynamics of assimilation evidenced in the diachronic analysis. Using the data provided by the *Soviet Tajik Encyclopedia* regarding territorial divisions, ethnic mix, and population numbers for more than one thousand villages, it hypothesizes that many Tajik villages in the Kuhistan are in a transitional stage. From the data, it seems that on their way to become Uzbek villages, Tajik villages pass through three stages: primarily Tajik, Tajik-Uzbek, and primarily Uzbek.

It is important to note at the very start, that this study is in no way conclusive. As far as the diachronic aspect of the study is concerned, there is a wealth of materials in Persian and Turkish languages that awaits examination. Regarding the synchronic aspect, too, a comparison between early 20th century Russian reports and the 1980's census is not sufficient. A new census, comprising the same factors, is needed before the dynamics of assimilation hypothesized here can be satisfactorily verified.

Historical Perspective

According to the Orkhon inscriptions, under Muhan (d. AD 553), Bumin, and Eshtemi, the Turks ruled a vast area to the north and East of Transoxania. The western wing of this Empire, known as the Empire of the Western Turks became involved in Iranian affairs when it collaborated with Khusrau I in overthrowing the mighty Hephthalite Empire in the 6th century. The Iranian monarch and the Turkish Overlord recognized the Amu river as the boundary between their respective nations. Transoxania, thus came under Turkish influence. Following the dictates of their tribal lifestyle, however, the Turks occupied only the areas that were best suited to their nomadic way of life. The towns and villages were left to themselves.

The 8th century Islamic invasion of Transoxania reversed the situation. The forces of Islam pushed the Turks out of Transoxania and held them at bay beyond the Syr River. Fortifications were established at various points to keep the infidel Turks away from the Islamic domains. These check points also served as trade and proselitization centers. Henceforth, Turks could enter Islamic domains either as slaves or as newly-born Muslims. The circumstances under which such individuals entered the Islamic domains, however, divested them of their nomadic way of life. Indeed, the newly converted were settled in the lime as examples of the good life offered by Islam to those who would accept the religion, settle, and contribute to the expansion of the faith.

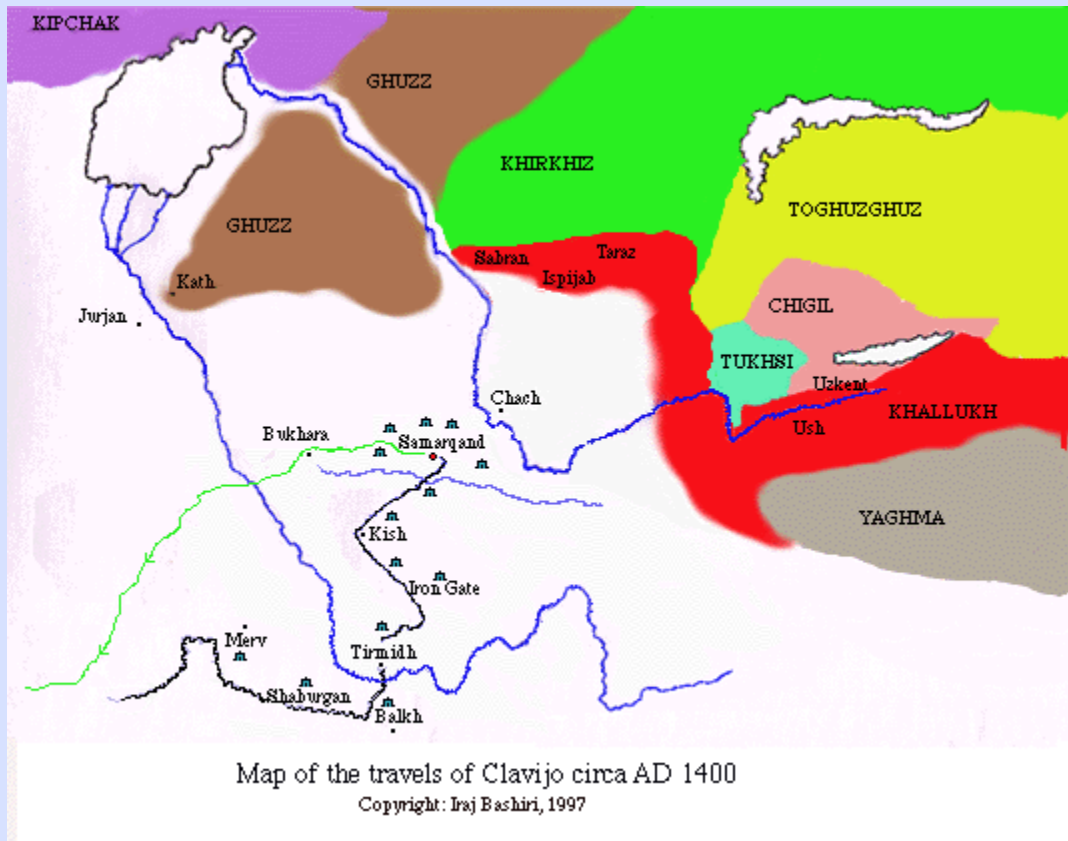


Historical sources, consisting of the reports of the anonymous author of the *Hudud al-'Alim*, the works of Ibn Hawqal and Abu Dulaf, as well as the analyses of Minorsky and Le Strange establish the boundary between the Turks and the Muslim inhabitants of the region at the following points:

- The city of Kath on the Amu Darya. This Turkish center was on the right side of the Amu from the Persian center of Jurjan
- The town of Sabiran, on the Syr, where the Ghuzz Turks traded with the Muslims
- The town of Ispijab on the border of the land of the Khallukh Turks
- The town of Taraz, the farthest region conquered by the Muslims
- The town of Uzkent at the source of the Syr in present-day Kyrgyzstan

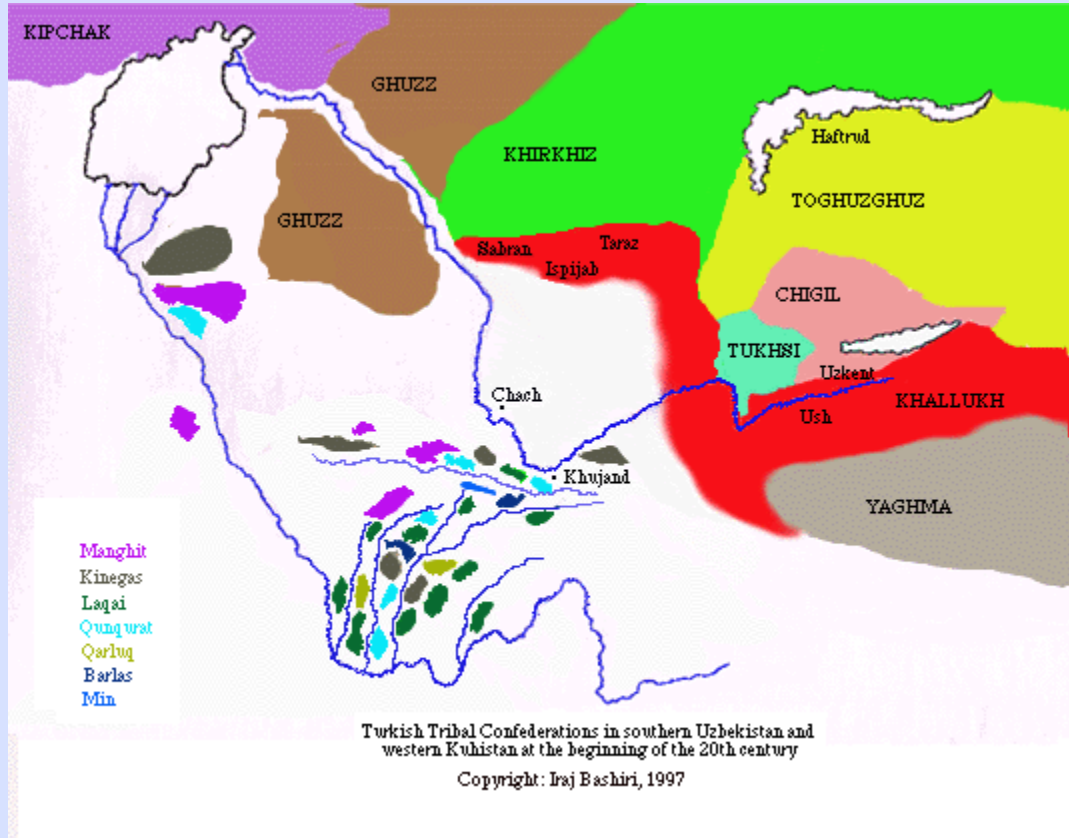
The discussion of the occupation of Transoxania by the Ghaznavids, the Seljuqs, and the Mongols is outside the purview of this paper. But the extent of Turkish distribution under these dynasties and the direction of Turkish expansion into the region fall within its scope. For instance, we are fortunate to have a first-hand 15th-century account about life in what is present-day southern Uzbekistan. The information is provided by Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo, the ambassador of the king of Spain to the court of Tamerlane. Clavijo provides a snap-shot view of Central Asia in 1405. His route took him from Merv to Samarqand, passing through Balkh, Termez, and Kish. At Termez, he reports, the language changed from Persian/Tajik into Chaghatai. From there he went to Kish and, eventually to Samarqand. All along the way, he reports, he was entertained in the *yurts* of the Chaghatais, except for a few occasions when he visited the neighboring towns. Clavijo, it

should be mentioned, is the closest eyewitness we have of the situation in Central Asia at the time of the death of Tamerlane (1405).



According to Clavijo, what is now southern Uzbekistan was occupied by the Chaghatais. The population, however, was a mix of Mongols, nomadizing Turks, and settled Turks and Tajiks. If the goings-on in Samarqand, the place about which Clavijo writes extensively, is an indication, only the chiefs of the tribes lived in towns. The rest of the tribal population migrated in the vicinity and gathered together only on particular occasions. One such gathering, in which Clavijo participated, was called by Tamerlane before his invasion of China. Within three days, Clavijo reports, over 20,000 *yurts*, each housing an extended family, appeared on the outskirts of Samarqand on a plain fed by the Zarafshan river. Clavijo marvels at the orderliness of the tribes and at how individuals knew their place not only in their own family but in the entire tribal hierarchy.

The first accounts of the composition of the tribes that populated southern Uzbekistan are provided by Russian explorers. Gathered at the turn of this century, the information indicates that present-day Uzbeks comprise a number of large and small tribes each with specific locations, tribal affiliations, and tribe and clan loyalties. The following are a few of the major Turkish tribes that lived in what is now southern Uzbekistan and western Kuhistan.



The Qarluqs (greenish yellow)

The Qarluqs were formed as a people after the dissolution of the Turkish Khaghanate in the 8th century. Originally hunter-gatherers and herders, the Qarluqs gradually became involved in settled life as farmers. Since the Silk Road passed their settlements, in Hafrud, they also became involved in trade. In 861, the Qarluqs captured Kashghar and by 960, when they accepted Islam, they were a major force in the kingdom of the Qarakhanids. In time, however, they lost their autonomy as a distinct political group and, seemingly, vanished in the great Turkish melting pot.

During the Soviet era, the Qarluqs were moved south to the Faizabad region of present-day Tajikistan. They can also be found in Sarchashma, Chandqartash, and Bisharik²

The Qunqurats (blue)

The ancestors of the Qunqurats, too, were from the plains of Mongolia. They came to Transoxania as a part of the army of Chingiz Khan in the 13th century. Here they were assisted by the Oguz Turks, the Qipchaks, and the other Turkish and Mongol tribes that had preceded them.

² See, *Soviet Tajik Encyclopedia (STE)*, vol. 8, p. 287; Paksoy, p. 38; Masov 1996, p. 30.

During the 14th and 15th centuries, tribes of the Qunqurats settled in Khurasan, northern Afghanistan and the Shirabad region of Hissar. From there, they expanded into the Zarafshan valley, Mirzachul, and the Khwarazm regions of Uzbekistan.

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, the Qunqurats were still semi-nomadic herders. Today, they can be found in southern Tajikistan in Qabadian as well as in parts of Qurqanteppe.³

The Laqais (dark green)

Essentially, from the Turko-Mongol tribes that migrated to Transoxania from the Qipchak plain, the Laqais were among the last to arrive. Earlier this century, the Laqais lived in Dehnau and Surkhandarya in present-day Uzbekistan and in Hissar and Baljuan in Tajikistan.

During the Soviet period, the Laqais contributed to the recovery and development of marshlands in Vakhsh, Kafirnihan, and Yavansu. As a result of their active participation in these and other projects on the lower reaches of the Yakhsu and Qizilsu, today we find good size Laqai settlements in the rayons of Vosse, Moscova, Shahrtuz, and Lenin. There are even some Laqai settlements around Dushanbe and in Urateppe.⁴

The Laqais speak a variety of Uzbeki that is close to the Qipchak language of the Kazakhs and the Karakalpaks.

At the present, as agriculturists, they blend with Uzbeks and the Tajiks. They are involved in industry as well as in the other aspects of social development in the republic.

The Kinegas (dark brown)

The Kinegas, a major Turkish group and a contender for the rulership of Central Asia before the Soviet era, are scattered all around the map, from Kazakhstan and Karakalpakistan to Samarqand, Karmina, Bukhara, the Ferghana valley, and northern Afghanistan.

Major populations of the Kinegas, however, are found in Shahr-i Sabz and Kitab in present-day Uzbekistan.

The Kinegas are herders and farmers. During the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, the Kinegas blended with a number of other tribes to form the present-day Uzbek nation.⁵

Manghits (purple)

³ *STE*, vol. 8, p. 325; Paksoy, p. 37.

⁴ *STE*, vol. 3, p. 609; Paksoy, p. 38.

⁵ *STE*, vol. 3, p. 295.

Having been swept into the Kipchak plain by the Mongols, the Manghits roamed the region between the Volga and the Urals for about a century. Then they accepted the Turkish language, formed a separate orda as Nogais and invaded Transoxania. Assuming the identity of the Turko-Mongol ruler, Khan Uzbek, who had converted them to Islam, they became part of the Kazakh and Karakalpak population of the region. As the rulers of the Emirate of Bukhara, the heads of the clans lived in Bukhara. The majority of the population, however, lived around Qarshi. Others lived on the shores of the Zarafshan, and in Charju, Jizzakh, and Khwarazm. Influenced by the Tajiks, by the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, most Manghits lived a semi-nomadic life.⁶

The Qataqans

The Qataqans are settled primarily in northeastern Afghanistan. Before the Soviet era, they used the pastures on both sides of the Panj. Later on, some groups settled in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In 1924, they numbered 27,200.

During the Soviet era, large populations of the Qataqans were included in the populations of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. In Tajikistan, they live in the valleys of the Vakhsh, Surkhab, Panj, and Yakhsu rivers. The Kulab rayon accommodates a considerable number of Qataqans in its Paytugh region.⁷

The Tajik-Uzbek Ethnic Scene

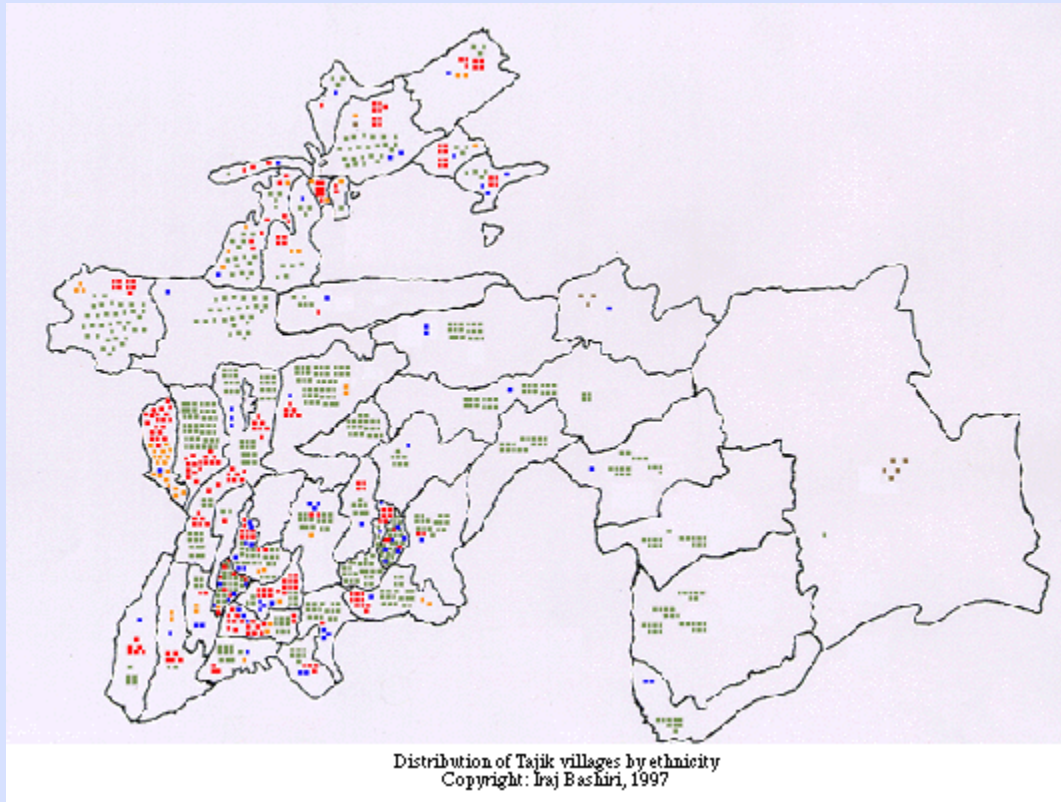
The data presented for the discussion of the Tajik-Uzbek assimilation processes is taken from the *Soviet Tajik Encyclopedia*, published between 1978 and 1988 in Dushanbe. Edited by the late Muhammad Asemi, the work encompasses a vast amount of information about almost all aspects of Tajik life, among them life in Tajikistan's rural communities. The information, provided for more than a thousand villages, includes accounts of territorial affiliation, population, ethnic composition, access to education, economic modes, and the distance from major urban centers, especially Dushanbe.

The present study is concerned primarily with the information provided for ethnic composition, especially the strength of the Uzbek settlements in the region as well as the process of assimilation of Tajik villages by the Uzbek population. This process, as the diachronic study illustrated, is not a recent phenomenon. It started around the Syr river in the 5th and 6th centuries. By now, however, it has reached the Kuhistan region of present-day Tajikistan. Needless to add that it is an ongoing process that cannot be either reversed or easily stopped.

The ethnic groups studied live in 1082 villages distinguished on the map that follows. The key to the map and an analysis of their interrelationship is provided further below:

⁶ *STE*, vol. 4, p. 193.

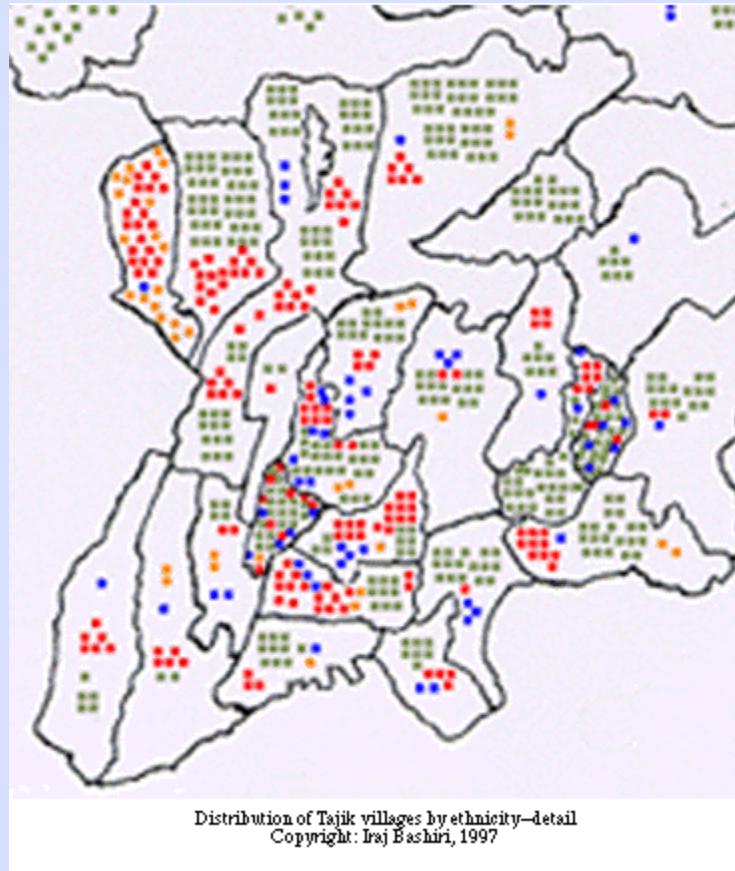
⁷ *STE*, vol. 8, p. 293; Masov 1996, p. 30.



- 1) Tajiks (green). They are found in all the rayons except in Nav, Jirgatal, and Regar. The *Encyclopedia* reports 653 Tajik villages altogether
- 2) Uzbeks (orange). There are about 50 totally Uzbek villages concentrated in the Markazi or Central rayons, especially in Regar. There are also heavy concentrations of Uzbek villages in the Kulab and Qurqanteppe territories.
- 3) Kyrgyz (gray). The majority of the Kyrgyz live in 5 villages in eastern Badakhshan. They also occupy 3 villages in Jirgatal, and 1 village in the Khujand rayon of Leninabad.
- 4) Russian, Kazakh, Tatar, etc. Except for 13 villages that are populated by Tajiks and Russians, most large urban centers (Dushanbe, Khujand, Kulab, Khorog) have a mixed population. For the purposes of this study, the 41 metropolitan areas represented in the *Encyclopedia* are not included in the survey. This, however, does not mean that they are not instrumental in deciding the direction of the assimilation process. They most certainly are; but a scientific account of their population mix is not available at the present time.

Assimilation, as we have seen, is a slow but steady process. Given appropriate data, its movement can be easily observed, assessed, and documented. The *Encyclopedia* discloses this information by creating intermediary categories. It creates a spectrum on

the one side of which is Tajik and on the other side Uzbek. In between are primarily Tajik, Tajik-Uzbek, and primarily Uzbek. We shall now view these categories in some detail.



1) Primarily Tajik (deep blue). Almost all rayons have at least one village that is primarily Tajik. Primarily Tajik means that some time in the recent past Uzbeks have moved into the village in sufficient strength to have a role in its administration and future direction. Surprisingly enough, even the West Badakhshan rayons, except Rushan, have at least one such pioneer settlement. Altogether, the data includes 73 primarily Tajik villages.

2) Tajik-Uzbek (red). The next group of villages in the process consists of those villages that have an even population of Tajiks and Uzbeks. All western territories include a relatively large number of such villages. Given the fact that before the Soviet era most Uzbeks were nomadic, it is fair to say that the forced settlement of the Uzbeks has made many originally Tajik villages vulnerable to Uzbek occupation. These villages, given proper circumstances, can easily become members of the next category. Altogether, there are 235 Tajik-Uzbek villages in the data.

3) Primarily Uzbek. These are villages the population of which includes Tajiks. The affairs of such villages are in the hands of the Uzbeks. Tajiks may exert influence on decisions. The number of these villages, it should be mentioned, is not high.

Let us briefly consider these numbers in the context of the territories and the rayons concerned. As the chart indicates, in Leninabad, the number of villages with Uzbek population and/or substantial Uzbek influence, is substantial: 123 Tajik only versus 90 other. In Qurqanteppe the latter number is even higher than its Tajik only villages: 104 versus 116. Only the Central territory (Markazi) and Kulab show some strength. The former is 203 Tajik versus 93 other and the latter is 136 Tajik only versus 40 villages with Uzbek population and/or substantial Uzbek influence.

| territory | Tajik | Primarily Tajik | Tajik/Uzbek | Uzbek |
|------------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Leninabad | 123 | 12 | 62 | 16 |
| Qurqanteppe | 104 | 31 | 74 | 11 |
| Markazi | 203 | 9 | 64 | 20 |
| Kulab | 136 | 18 | 29 | 3 |

Territories Compared

As large entities, territories do not show the easterly direction of the assimilation process. For this we go to the rayon level and apply the same comparative method to Regar, Kulab, and Komsomolabad. These are not rayons chosen at random, but rayons in which the process is best illustrated.

As the following table indicates, Regar, although one of the western-most, is the weakest of the Tajik rayons. There are 0 Tajik only villages versus 39 villages with substantial Uzbek influence, 18 of them Uzbek. In the center, the Kulab rayon has 24 Tajik villages and 10 villages with Uzbek influence. There are no Uzbek only villages in the data for Kulab. Komsomolabad, in the Darvaz region in the east, is the reverse of Regar. It has 28 Tajik villages and only 1 Primarily Tajik village.

| Rayon | Tajik | Primarily Tajik | Tajik/Uzbek | Uzbek |
|--------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Regar | 0 | 1 | 20 | 18 |
| Kulab | 24 | 6 | 4 | 0 |
| Komsomolabad | 28 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

Rayons Compared

Conclusion

The amount of data available for analysis is considerable. A preliminary analysis indicates that Tajik villages are gradually being overtaken by Uzbek inhabitants. It also shows that this silent "invasion" is part of a steady progress that has been ongoing since

the appearance of the Turks in Central Asia around the year 1000. For the sake of the future survival and development of the Tajiks as an ethnic group, it is essential for the Uzbeks and, indeed, for the world at large to assess the impact of this steady assimilation process and devise methods to curb it. As for the Tajiks themselves, they need to devise strategic educational, administrative, and social programs that would protect their ethnic identity.

[Top of the page](#)

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[Factors Affecting Tajik Identity](#)

[Tajik Ethnicity in Historical Perspective](#)

[Samanids and Tajik Identity](#)

[Kyrgyz National Identity](#)

[Ethnic Conflict in Osh](#)

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