

**THE LIBRARY SYSTEM IN THE SAMANID ERA AND ITS ROLE IN SCIENTIFIC
AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT**

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Annotation: This article examines the library system of the Samanid era and its significant role in the scientific, educational, and spiritual development of society. During the 9th–10th centuries, libraries in Mawarannahr and Khorasan functioned as major centers for preserving and disseminating knowledge. The study highlights the activities of mosque, madrasa, palace, private, and specialized libraries, as well as their organizational structure, manuscript preservation methods, and financing through waqf endowments. The article also analyzes the contribution of prominent scholars and rulers to the development of library culture and emphasizes the importance of libraries in supporting scientific progress, education, and cultural continuity in the Samanid state.

Keywords: Samanid era, libraries, scientific development, spiritual culture, waqf system, manuscript preservation, mosque libraries, madrasa libraries, palace libraries, Central Asia, education, Ibn Sina, cultural heritage.

The Samanid period (9th–10th centuries), following the rule of the Marwanids, acquired a strong Islamic spiritual character and witnessed a remarkable revolution in science and culture in Mawarannahr and Khorasan. During this era, great importance was attached to knowledge and intellectual thought, which led to the establishment of numerous public and private libraries. The Samanid caliphs and amirs, who actively supported state culture, paid special attention to encouraging scholarly activity and collecting books. As a result, libraries were opened in every major congregational mosque, and the integration of these libraries transformed them into centers of scientific learning and cultural development. For example, in cities such as Bukhara, Samarkand, and Merv — which were renowned centers of hadith, fiqh, and other Islamic sciences — libraries played a highly active role. The congregational mosque library in Merv was particularly famous for preserving various dictionaries and scholarly works. Such large libraries served as a strong foundation for culture and education.

During the reign of the Samanid amirs, the development of science, enlightenment, and education became a key aspect of state policy. Extensive collections of historical, religious, and scientific works were gathered during this period. Consequently, countless libraries were built across the Turkic regions of Central Asia, and the careers of qualified scholars were strongly supported. Libraries attached to congregational mosques connected students and the general population with cultural and educational life. These libraries contained not only books on religious sciences such as the Qur'an, hadith, and fiqh, but also works on literature, linguistics, and other fields of knowledge. In particular, the library of the congregational mosque in Merv possessed one of the richest collections, including scientific dictionaries and valuable manuscripts. In general, during the Samanid era, libraries became centers of scientific research, madrasa education, and public culture. The peace and prosperity of the country, along with the development of trade relations, further strengthened and supported this process.

During the Samanid period, libraries existed in various forms of ownership. On the one hand, there were state and public libraries. Congregational mosque libraries and official palace libraries were financed by the state and served the wider public. For example, the palace library of Nuh ibn Mansur in Bukhara was an important royal state library where scholarly works on different sciences were systematically preserved in separate rooms. According to the writings of Ibn Sina, when he visited this library, he observed that books were carefully arranged in large shelves and compartments. One room contained books on poetry and literature, another held works on fiqh, while other rooms were devoted to different branches of knowledge. Likewise, during the rule of the Khwarazmshahs, state-supported libraries also existed in various cities.

On the other hand, there were many private libraries. These belonged to wealthy landowners, amirs, ministers, prominent scholars, and intellectuals. Almost every educated and wealthy statesman who valued knowledge maintained a private library in his home. Historical sources indicate that distinguished scholars such as Abu Rayhan al-Biruni and Ibn Sina possessed extensive personal collections containing dozens or even hundreds of books. In many cases, the books of deceased scholars were also added to such private collections. Rare manuscripts obtained through book trade or inheritance were often donated to libraries so that they would not disappear from intellectual life.

Thus, during the Samanid era, both state (institutional) libraries and privately owned libraries existed side by side. State-established libraries mainly functioned in madrasas and congregational mosques, serving the public and supporting education, while private libraries preserved valuable scholarly works collected by wealthy patrons and eminent scholars. Both types of libraries were closely interconnected and together enriched the general scientific and intellectual environment of the time.

The structure of Samanid libraries was systematic and carefully organized. Books were classified according to branches of knowledge and stored in separate sections and rooms. In his description of the library, Ibn Sina noted that each room was filled with books devoted to different fields of learning such as poetry, fiqh, Sufism, and other sciences. This arrangement made it easier to preserve, organize, and locate books. For example, in the famous palace library of Bukhara, where the collection was extremely rich, books on philosophy and other sciences, as well as Arabic literature, poetry, and legal works, were kept in separate rooms.

Responsibilities among the library staff were clearly distributed. There were positions such as the director (manager or chief secretary), the *خزین* (treasurer and record keeper), the supervisor (*mushrif*), and the librarian (*kutubdor*). The director was responsible for the general administration of the library and for appointing other staff members. The treasurer maintained records of books and supervised the library's financial affairs. The supervisor monitored discipline and order within the library. The librarian, sometimes called a "guardian" or "keeper of books," was responsible for cataloguing manuscripts, arranging them according to titles and subjects, and providing the requested works to readers.

Library staff also carefully supervised the preservation of rare and valuable manuscripts. Great attention was given not only to lending books to readers but also to handling them properly and repairing them whenever necessary. For example, when Ibn Sina visited the library, he observed that every room was filled with shelves of books, while the librarians were able to locate requested manuscripts quickly through systematic catalogues. In general, constant supervision and financial support ensured the physical preservation of books and manuscripts.

During the Samanid period, libraries also employed specialists responsible for copying manuscripts. Professional scribes and copyists worked continuously in libraries, reproducing books by hand from original manuscripts. Upon the request of scholars or students, they

prepared new copies of books, thereby enriching library collections and helping preserve scientific knowledge.

In addition, there existed a system for safeguarding manuscripts through deposit arrangements. Owners of valuable and important manuscripts could entrust their works to libraries for safe preservation and public use over a certain period of time. Libraries registered these books, protected them carefully, and made them available to authorized readers or returned them to their owners when required. According to scholarly tradition, manuscripts written in gold or containing rare knowledge were stored separately to prevent them from falling into unqualified hands. For instance, Ibn Sina visited the palace of the Samanid ruler Nuh ibn Mansur and examined collections of manuscripts produced by the scholars of that era, requesting access to the most valuable works. Thus, the practices of manuscript copying and the preservation of books for public scholarly use were highly developed and systematically organized within Samanid libraries.

Alongside state financing, the waqf (endowment) system was also widely implemented during the Samanid period. According to Islamic ethics and law, certain portions of property and land were permanently dedicated to mosques, madrasas, and other religious and educational institutions as charitable endowments. The income generated from these lands was not distributed privately; instead, it was used to provide stable financial support for schools, mosques, and their associated libraries. In other words, Samanid rulers and members of the nobility allocated waqf lands for the construction and maintenance of mosques and madrasas. These endowments encouraged the pursuit of knowledge among students and also served as an important financial source for library activities. Although legal sources do not explicitly state that a fixed share of state revenues was assigned directly to libraries and madrasas, it can be assumed that mechanisms existed to support state libraries through waqf income.

During the Samanid era, the major cities of Central Asia — such as Bukhara, Samarkand, and Merv — developed into important commercial and financial centers, where the book trade also flourished. In the markets of these cities, books on Islamic sciences, logic, astronomy, geography, medicine, and many other subjects were actively sold. Just as books of various scientific fields circulated widely in China, manuscripts from different regions of the Islamic world were also brought into Central Asia. Merchants imported valuable manuscripts from Persia, India, and the Middle East and distributed them throughout the region. In this way, important scholarly works were supplied to public and state libraries through extensive trade networks.

As a result, books on a wide variety of subjects became more accessible, and library collections grew significantly richer. Through trade and transportation routes, many rare and valuable manuscripts reached the libraries established in congregational mosques and royal palaces under the Samanids, contributing greatly to their development and prestige.

Types of Libraries During the Samanid Period

Mosque libraries were public libraries located within mosques and intended to serve the wider community. Almost every major congregational mosque had a library established for preserving religious and educational books and for providing learning opportunities to people interested in knowledge. According to historical accounts recorded by Ibn al-Athir, every major mosque in Bukhara possessed a library, while the library in Merv was considered one of the largest. These libraries were used after communal prayers for scholarly gatherings, lectures by imams and khatibs, and the teaching activities of religious scholars.

Madrassa libraries mainly served students, researchers, and teachers studying in educational institutions. These libraries preserved books on various sciences and translations of Eastern scholarly works acquired through waqf funding. Teachers used these collections during lessons and scholarly discussions. Madrasa libraries contained Qur'anic commentaries, collections of hadith, jurisprudential works, and other textbooks. As a result, they functioned as important scientific and educational centers for higher learning and local educational institutions.

Private libraries consisted of book collections kept in the homes of wealthy and educated individuals. Their owners included scholars, government officials, merchants, and enlightened landowners. Prominent scholars such as Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, Ibn Sina, and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi maintained personal libraries in their homes, and some of their collections became famous in intellectual circles. Although such libraries were not promoted as publicly as state-supported institutions, they continuously contributed to the preservation and accumulation of scholarly literature.

Palace libraries were special libraries located within the residences of rulers, amirs, and sultans. These libraries were maintained through state financial support and contained Arabic, Persian, Indian, and Greek works from earlier civilizations. For example, the palace library of the Samanid ruler Nuh ibn Mansur in Bukhara was extremely rich. Books were arranged room by room according to scientific fields, and comprehensive catalogues were prepared for systematic use.

High-ranking ministers, palace officials, and wealthy merchants also maintained their own libraries. These collections were usually organized either within government offices or in private residences for educational and intellectual purposes. Unlike state libraries, they were financed through personal wealth, yet they still collected materials valuable for scholarly and cultural activities.

Great scholars, philosophers, and literary figures often established their own specialized libraries. In scholarly circles described by intellectual historians, teachers and scholars were expected to collect books and preserve knowledge. Such libraries contained works of famous Muslim authors, dictionaries, medical texts, and books on many other sciences. Although these collections were rarely open to the public, they played a highly important role in scientific research and intellectual development.

Specialized libraries were attached to particular institutions and focused on specific branches of knowledge. For example, khanqahs (Sufi lodges) preserved literature on Sufism and religious sciences, observatories collected works on astronomy, madrasas specialized in Islamic philosophy, and hospitals maintained medical books. Thus, institutions often organized libraries dedicated to a particular field of expertise.

In the modern sense, public libraries did not yet exist; however, mosque and madrasa libraries were generally open to broad sections of society. People could visit them to read books, study manuscripts, and improve their literacy and knowledge. Therefore, libraries attached to congregational mosques and madrasas effectively fulfilled the role of public libraries by spreading education and knowledge among the community.

Libraries occupied a special place in the culture of the Samanid era. Through their establishment and service to society, libraries became essential platforms for preserving scientific knowledge, transmitting it from generation to generation, and encouraging new

intellectual research. Alongside state-supported libraries, private libraries also actively participated in collecting and safeguarding scholarly heritage. Within the internal organization of libraries, the classification of books by subject, the distribution of staff responsibilities, and the cataloguing system were all highly developed and carefully organized. Waqf endowments and trade relations provided libraries with a stable financial foundation, while great scholars and rulers expanded public education through these institutions. Together, these factors transformed the Samanid period into one of the brightest eras of scientific and cultural flourishing. Thus, the structure and social significance of libraries during the Samanid age laid the foundation for the scientific and educational traditions that later developed in Uzbekistan and throughout Central Asia.

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