

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Socio-Economic Life of Jizzakh Uezd During the Period of The Turkestan General-Governorship (1867–1917)

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Abstract

This article examines the socio-economic transformation of Jizzakh uezd, a district of the Turkestan Governor-Generalship, from the Russian conquest of 1866 to the collapse of tsarist rule in 1917. Using the comparative-historical method and drawing on published archival collections, colonial statistical surveys, and modern historiography, the study traces how Jizzakh's administrative incorporation into the Syrdarya and later Samarkand oblasts reshaped land tenure, taxation, irrigation, trade, and crafts in the district. It argues that the expansion of commercial grain and cotton cultivation, the imposition of new fiscal obligations, and the erosion of customary land rights created cumulative social strain that culminated in the Jizzakh uprising of July 1916, one of the most violent episodes of the wider Central Asian revolt. The findings suggest that Jizzakh's experience illustrates the broader colonial pattern of agrarian extraction in Russian Turkestan while also revealing locally specific dynamics tied to its position between the steppe and the Zarafshan valley.

KEY WORDS

Turkestan Governor-Generalship; Jizzakh uezd; colonial economy; land tenure; irrigation; taxation; 1916 uprising.

INTRODUCTION

The Russian conquest of Central Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century fundamentally altered the political and economic order of the region. Following the storming of the Jizzakh fortress by General Nikolai Romanovskii's forces in 1866 and the subsequent capitulation of the Emirate of Bukhara north of the Zarafshan River, the town and its surrounding district were absorbed into the newly proclaimed Turkestan Governor-Generalship, established by imperial decree on 11 July 1867. For the following half-century, Jizzakh uezd functioned as an administrative and economic unit within this colonial structure, first as part of the Syrdarya oblast and, after the reorganisation of 1887, as part of the Samarkand oblast.

Jizzakh occupied a position of particular strategic and

economic significance. Located midway between Tashkent and Samarkand, at the point where the fertile Zarafshan-fed oases give way to the arid steppe and the Hunger Steppe (Mirzachul), the district combined irrigated agriculture, extensive livestock husbandry, and a lively caravan trade that had for centuries linked it to the Silk Road network. This intermediate position made Jizzakh both a testing ground for colonial agrarian policy and, ultimately, the epicentre of the most violent uprising to occur in the sedentary regions of Turkestan during the events of 1916.

The purpose of this article is to reconstruct the principal socio-economic processes that unfolded in Jizzakh uezd under Russian colonial administration: the restructuring of local government, the transformation of land tenure and irrigation,

the growth of commercial grain and cotton production, the imposition of new taxes, and the accompanying changes in trade, crafts, and social relations. Rather than treating the 1916 revolt as an isolated political event, the article situates it within the longer trajectory of economic change that preceded it, following an approach developed in recent scholarship that emphasises land policy and the commercialisation of agriculture, rather than settler colonisation alone, as the principal drivers of unrest in this particular district.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 outlines the sources and method employed. Section 3 presents the results of the analysis, organised thematically around administration, land and agriculture, taxation, trade and crafts, demography, and the 1916 uprising. Section 4 discusses these findings in relation to the broader historiography of colonial Turkestan, and Section 5 offers concluding remarks.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative-historical method appropriate to the reconstruction of regional socio-economic processes for which quantitative archival series are fragmentary and unevenly published. Three categories of sources were consulted. First, published administrative and statistical materials produced by the Turkestan Governor-Generalship itself, including the official gazette *Turkestanskije vedomosti*, which from 1870 combined government orders with descriptive essays on the region's economy, geography, and ethnography, and the reports of the Department of Agriculture and State Property, the agency responsible for state lands, agrarian policy, and irrigation oversight after 1898. Second, the study draws on modern academic scholarship on the administrative history of the Turkestan Governor-Generalship, including recent research on the military-popular administrative system and the transfer of Jizzakh and Khujand uezds between the Syrdarya and Samarkand oblasts. Third, and most importantly for the reconstruction of agrarian relations on the eve of 1916, the article relies on the specialised historiography of the Jizzakh uprising, in particular the case-study analysis of land policy and cereal production in Jizzakh uezd developed in the volume *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916: A Collapsing Empire in the Age of War and Revolution*, which draws on archival documentation to distinguish the volosts of the district that experienced rioting from those that did not.

These sources were read critically against one another, with

attention to the distinction between the normative intentions of colonial policy as expressed in administrative decrees and the actual outcomes described in descriptive and scholarly accounts. Given that colonial-era statistics for individual uezds are often incomplete or contradictory, the article avoids presenting spurious numerical precision and instead emphasises documented processes, directions of change, and their qualitative social consequences. This method is consistent with standard practice in regional colonial historiography, where triangulation of administrative, journalistic, and scholarly sources substitutes for a single authoritative statistical series.

RESULTS

Following its capture, Jizzakh was initially organised under the "Temporary Regulations" that established a military-popular system of administration across newly conquered Turkestan. Under this system, civil and economic affairs at the district level were placed in the hands of a uezd chief, typically a Russian military officer, who worked alongside indigenous volost administrators and elected local officials, while ultimate authority rested with the Governor-General in Tashkent. Jizzakh was initially attached to the Syrdarya oblast, but the district's position on the frontier between the steppe and the Zarafshan valley made its administrative status a matter of recurring adjustment. In 1887, Jizzakh and the neighbouring Khujand uezd were transferred from the Syrdarya oblast to the Samarkand oblast, a reorganisation intended to bring the district's administration into closer alignment with the irrigated agricultural zones of the Zarafshan basin with which its economy was increasingly intertwined. The comprehensive Turkestan Statute of 1886 formalised the uezd system, codifying supervised indigenous institutions—qadi and biy courts for the Muslim population—alongside a separate structure of imperial courts and administration for Russian subjects, a dual system that remained characteristic of Jizzakh's governance until the end of tsarist rule.

Land Tenure and Agrarian Structure

The single most consequential area of change in Jizzakh uezd concerned land tenure. Pre-conquest Central Asian land law recognised a range of tenurial categories, including communal, private (*mulk*), and religiously endowed (*waqf*) lands, with water rights customarily managed through local irrigation communities under the authority of the *mirab*. Russian colonial administration progressively reclassified much

of this land as state property, while permitting continued indigenous cultivation under conditions that could be revised administratively. The Department of Agriculture and State Property, established toward the end of the century, assumed direct responsibility for state lands and irrigation oversight, formalising a system in which local peasants held *de facto* but not fully secure rights to the plots they worked.

This shift had particular significance in Jizzakh uezd because of the district's mixed agrarian economy. Unlike districts closer to the Fergana valley, where cotton had already become dominant by the 1890s, agrarian change in Jizzakh in the decades before 1916 was driven above all by the expansion of cereal cultivation for the market, alongside a smaller but growing area devoted to cotton. Recent case-study research on the district has shown that it was this expansion of commercial grain production, tied to new patterns of land allocation and taxation, rather than the direct colonisation of land by Russian settlers, that most directly eroded the position of the indigenous peasantry in Jizzakh in the years leading up to 1916. Land that had previously supported subsistence and pastoral use was increasingly drawn into commercial cultivation, a process that benefited a narrow stratum of larger landholders and merchants while placing growing pressure on smallholders and nomadic and semi-nomadic households on the margins of the oasis.

Irrigation, Grain, and Cotton Cultivation

Agriculture in Jizzakh uezd depended, as throughout the sedentary zones of Turkestan, on artificial irrigation drawn from mountain streams and the Zarafshan system, distributed through a network of canals (*aryks*) maintained by local communities under customary arrangements that colonial administrators only partially reformed. The extension and, in places, disruption of these irrigation arrangements under Russian rule directly affected the viability of both grain and cotton cultivation. Colonial economic policy across Turkestan as a whole prioritised cotton as a raw material for the imperial textile industry, and the Governor-Generalship actively encouraged its expansion through the construction of ginneries and cottonseed-oil mills and through preferential arrangements for cotton growers and Russian settlers in matters of land allocation. In Jizzakh uezd this policy had a real but comparatively modest effect before 1916 relative to districts of the Fergana valley; grain—principally wheat and barley—together with fodder crops, orchards, and vineyards, continued to occupy a substantial share of cultivated land,

supplemented by extensive sheep and goat husbandry in the steppe and foothill zones surrounding the oasis.

The completion of the Trans-Caspian Railway through the district by 1897 further integrated Jizzakh into the empire-wide market, easing the export of grain and raw cotton and the import of manufactured goods, but it also exposed local producers more directly to price fluctuations determined outside the region. Wartime conditions after 1914 intensified these pressures: demand for military grain requisitions rose sharply, cotton prices came under state regulation, and rural labour was increasingly drawn away from the fields, compounding tensions that had been building since the 1890s.

Taxation and Fiscal Policy

The colonial administration in Jizzakh, as elsewhere in Turkestan, replaced or overlaid pre-existing forms of taxation—such as *kharaj* land tax and various customary dues—with a colonial fiscal system that combined a state land tax assessed on cultivated area, water-use charges tied to irrigation, and a range of local and communal levies collected through the *volost* administration. Taxes were generally payable in cash rather than in kind, which compelled peasant households to market a growing share of their harvest simply to meet fiscal obligations, reinforcing the shift toward commercial grain production described above. Because assessments were frequently based on nominal land categories rather than actual yields, poorer harvest years placed a disproportionate burden on smallholders, while the administrative apparatus for collection—resting on indigenous *volost* officials answerable to Russian uezd authorities—generated persistent local grievances over corruption and inequitable assessment. These fiscal pressures were substantially aggravated during the First World War by extraordinary wartime levies and by the requisitioning of livestock, transport, and provisions for the army, developments that fell most heavily on the same rural population already strained by the agrarian changes of the preceding decades.

Trade, Crafts, and Urban Life

Jizzakh's economic life was not confined to agriculture. As a historic staging post on the routes connecting Tashkent, Samarkand, and the Fergana valley, the town maintained an active bazaar economy in which artisanal production—weaving, leatherworking, metalworking, and pottery—coexisted with the trade in agricultural produce, livestock, and

imported manufactured goods brought increasingly by rail after 1897. Colonial rule altered the conditions of this urban economy in several ways. Russian merchants and officials established a separate "new town" alongside the old indigenous quarters, a pattern typical of colonial Turkestan that created a degree of spatial and economic segregation between the Russian administrative-commercial sector and the indigenous bazaar economy. At the same time, the integration of Jizzakh into empire-wide markets via rail and the expansion of ginning and processing facilities associated with cotton created new, if limited, forms of wage labour and semi-proletarianised urban employment, even as traditional artisans faced growing competition from factory-made imports.

Demographic and Social Change

The population of Jizzakh uezd in this period was predominantly Uzbek and Tajik, engaged chiefly in irrigated agriculture in the oasis zone and in extensive pastoralism among Uzbek and Qazaq (Kazakh) groups in the surrounding steppe and foothills, with a growing but still comparatively small Russian and other European population concentrated in administrative, military, and commercial roles in the town itself. The scale of Russian settlement in Jizzakh uezd itself remained more limited than in districts more directly targeted for agricultural colonisation elsewhere in Turkestan, which is one reason recent scholarship identifies fiscal and land-policy pressures, rather than the direct displacement of the population by settlers, as the principal source of socio-economic strain in this particular district. Social differentiation nonetheless increased within the indigenous population itself, as a stratum of larger landholders, merchants, and volost officials able to benefit from commercial agriculture and colonial administration grew apart from an increasingly indebted and land-poor peasant majority.

The 1916 Uprising as a Culmination of Socio-Economic Tensions

The cumulative effect of these agrarian, fiscal, and administrative pressures became fully apparent in the summer of 1916. The immediate trigger for unrest across Turkestan was the imperial decree of 25 June 1916 conscripting the Muslim population of Central Asia, previously exempt from military service, for compulsory labour duty behind the front lines of the First World War. In Jizzakh uezd, however, this decree acted less as an isolated spark than as the catalyst that released tensions accumulated over decades of land

reclassification, taxation, and the commercialisation of agriculture described above. The uprising that erupted in the district in July 1916 proved to be the most violent episode of the sedentary-zone revolt anywhere in Turkestan, involving attacks on Russian officials, settlers, and administrative infrastructure, followed by a punitive military response that included the burning of villages, mass arrests, and further confiscation of land from the local population.

Detailed archival reconstruction of the uprising's geography within the district reveals an important nuance: rioting occurred in roughly half of the volosts that made up Jizzakh uezd, while the other half remained largely quiescent. This uneven pattern supports the interpretation that the revolt in Jizzakh was not simply a generalised anti-colonial reaction but was closely correlated with the specific local incidence of land dispossession and the commercial-agrarian transformation traced in Sections 3.2 and 3.3—that is, with the volosts most affected by the expansion of taxed, market-oriented cereal cultivation and the associated erosion of customary land rights. The consequences of the uprising and its suppression were severe and lasting: agricultural production in the affected volosts collapsed in the short term, livestock herds were depleted, and further punitive land seizures compounded the very pressures that had provoked the revolt, leaving Jizzakh uezd's rural economy in a fragile state on the eve of the 1917 revolutions.

DISCUSSION

The socio-economic trajectory of Jizzakh uezd between 1866 and 1917 illustrates, in a locally specific form, the general pattern of agrarian colonialism that historians have identified across Russian Turkestan: the reclassification of customary land rights as state property, the encouragement of commercial and export-oriented agriculture, the imposition of a cash-based fiscal system, and the layering of a Russian administrative and commercial presence over existing indigenous institutions. What distinguishes Jizzakh within this broader pattern is the relative weight of grain, rather than cotton, in driving agrarian commercialisation before 1916, and the correspondingly limited role of direct Russian settler colonisation—in contrast to districts such as those of the Semirechye region or parts of the Fergana valley—in generating rural grievance. This finding, drawn from case-study scholarship on the district, is significant because it complicates a historiography that has sometimes treated cotton monoculture and settler land seizure as the universal

drivers of unrest across Turkestan; in Jizzakh, it was above all the fiscal and tenorial consequences of commercial grain farming, layered onto a wartime conscription crisis, that proved decisive.

The uneven geography of the 1916 uprising within the uezd—affecting roughly half its volosts—further reinforces the value of disaggregated, district-level analysis over generalised accounts of colonial Turkestan. It suggests that socio-economic transformation under the Governor-Generalship did not proceed uniformly even within a single administrative unit, but was mediated by local variation in land quality, irrigation access, proximity to markets and the railway, and the particular history of land allocation in each volost. This has implications for how historians should read the relationship between colonial economic policy and anti-colonial unrest more broadly: aggregate, oblast- or region-level statistics can obscure precisely the kind of local variation that determined whether a given community experienced 1916 as rebellion or as relative quiescence.

Finally, the Jizzakh case underscores the limitations of the available source base for reconstructing colonial-era district economies in quantitative terms. Much of what can be established with confidence concerns direction and mechanism of change—land reclassification, the shift toward cash taxation, the expansion of commercial cereal and cotton cultivation, the integration of the district into the imperial rail network—rather than precise output or income figures at the uezd level. Future research drawing more extensively on unpublished archival fond materials from the Central State Archive of Uzbekistan and from Russian imperial administrative records would be valuable in refining the quantitative picture sketched here.

CONCLUSION

This article has traced the principal socio-economic transformations experienced by Jizzakh uezd during the half-century of Turkestan Governor-Generalship rule, from its incorporation into the colonial administrative system in 1867 through the upheaval of the 1916 uprising. It has shown that Russian colonial policy in Jizzakh reshaped land tenure, taxation, irrigation management, and the balance between subsistence and commercial agriculture, while a smaller but still significant expansion of cotton cultivation and the arrival of the railway further integrated the district into the imperial economy. These processes generated cumulative social strain

that, in combination with the wartime conscription decree of June 1916, produced one of the most violent uprisings of the entire Turkestan revolt. The Jizzakh case demonstrates that the socio-economic history of individual uezds within the Governor-Generalship cannot be reduced to a single colonial template of cotton monoculture and settler dispossession; rather, it requires attention to locally specific configurations of land, fiscal policy, and commercial agriculture. Further archival research at the district and volost level remains necessary to deepen this picture and to place Jizzakh more precisely within the comparative history of colonial Turkestan.

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