

## **History of the Construction of the Early Orthodox Churches in the Turkestan**

**Abduvakhidov Dilshod Narbotirovich**

PhD doctoral student, Samarkand State of University, Samarkand, Uzbekistan  
norbotirovich@mail.ru

**Abstract:** This article explores the historical, social, political, and cultural developments of 19th-century Turkestan, focusing on the influence of the Russian Empire during its expansion into Central Asia. The study examines how Russian imperial policy shaped local life, particularly through the introduction of new administrative systems, military governance, and religious architecture. Special attention is given to the construction of Orthodox churches as symbols of Russian authority and instruments of cultural transformation. These churches were not only religious centers but also tools of Russification, representing the Empire's efforts to assert control over the predominantly Muslim population. The analysis draws from official imperial decrees, colonial records, and historical accounts to highlight how church-building projects were strategically implemented to reinforce the presence of Russian settlers, military personnel, and administrators. Additionally, the article discusses how these constructions impacted the urban landscape, altered traditional power structures, and influenced local cultural dynamics. By contextualizing the religious and architectural changes within the broader framework of imperial policy, this study provides insight into the complex interplay between colonization, religion, and identity in 19th-century Turkestan.

**Keywords:** Turkestan, Orthodoxy, K.P. von Kaufman, Russian Empire, Prince Alexander Nevsky, Kapiton Vysotsky, Jesus Christ, Kazalinsk, Andrey Malov, Tashkent, Khojand, St. Nicholas Church, Samarkand, Zarafshan district, Kattakurgan.

**INTRODUCTION.** The study of the history of the construction of Orthodox churches in the Turkestan region is of great importance for understanding the cultural and religious history of the region. Since the second half of the XIX century, with the increasing political, economic and cultural influence of the Russian Empire on the Turkestan region, the construction of Orthodox churches in this region has become more active. This process has had a significant impact on the social life and urban development processes of the region. This article discusses the factors that led to the construction of the first Orthodox churches in the Turkestan region, their location and architectural styles, as well as the impact of this process on the life of the local population in the region. At the same time, the historical circumstances associated with the construction of churches, the goals of the Russian Empire and the attitude of the multinational population of the region to this process are analyzed.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS.** In studying the history of the construction of Orthodox churches in the Turkestan region, local and foreign sources and scientific research serve as the main sources of information. In general, the historiography of Orthodox churches in Turkestan began to take shape in the middle of the XIX century, after the region was conquered by the

Russian Empire. The authors of this period are divided into representatives of the state-church and church approaches in covering the events of the colonization of the Turkestan region. It should be noted that the former are aimed at highlighting the works of authors who held various administrative positions in Turkestan and, first of all, at revealing the essence of state-religious relations in the region. These include the works and personal notes of K.P. Kaufman, S.M. Dukhovsky, G.A. Arandarenko, N.S. Likoshina, V.P. Nalivkina, N.P. Ostromov and others[1]. However, their works reflect subjective objectivity and an unbiased, unsympathetic view of the life and customs of Turkestan. Thus, in the works of the above authors, the information on the construction of churches is not extensive and is presented in the form of a small part of a certain section. Within the framework of this study, archival documents, government decrees, reports of Orthodox missionaries, and works on modern historiography written at the turn of the XIX and XX centuries were analyzed. In particular, statistical materials and special research works on the Turkestan region published during the Russian Empire are of great importance in shedding light on this topic. In the process of analyzing the literature, several research directions were identified. First, the main documents on the activities of Russian Orthodox churches in Turkestan were considered. Second, materials reflecting the religious policy of the Russian Empire in the region were analyzed. Third, studies that reveal the cultural, social, and economic consequences of this process were studied.

**RESULTS.** Even before the establishment of the Turkestan diocese, the first Orthodox churches began to be built in this region for a quarter of a century, and priests served in them. Their emergence here was associated with the fact that from the middle of the XIX century the Russian Empire began to consistently continue its influence in Central Asia and incorporate the southern lands into its empire. The invasion was carried out by two forces: from the north-west - by the Orenburg and Ural troops, and from the north-east - by the Siberian troops. The Russian troops of that time were also accompanied by regimental priests. When the invaders stopped somewhere, they, the priests, conducted their own religious services. But often the situation was such that there were no even the simplest conditions for holding a prayer service or divine service. For example, the Russian troops advancing from Orenburg to Tashkent were accompanied by only one field church named after the holy Prince Alexander Nevsky. From the memoirs of Kapiton Vysotsky, one of the first priests who arrived in Turkestan with the Russian troops, I can imagine some aspects of the life of a regimental chaplain in those years: "The commander of the 3rd battalion, a colonel who was a Lutheran by religion, offered me a linen tent covered with cloth for prayer. I had to accept the offer. Having set up this tent and in it the icons belonging to the battalion, a cross, a Bible and a table for candles, I began the service. And during the prayer, the soldiers stood in the mud under the rain, performing their religious rites...".

Colonel F.I. Lobyshevich, a participant in the Khiva campaign, describes the celebration of Easter when the troops were surrounded by the desert; "On the last day, Saturday, April 7, from early morning, the field priest Andrei Malov was busy erecting a church tent from tightly packed Bukhara tents. On April 7, the weather was very clear. But in the evening the thermometer dropped to 4 degrees, and at that moment the wind from the northwest was piercing to the bone. In some places in the camp, fires were burning, warming the soldiers who had not slept. A large bonfire was burning near the field church, and there a group of soldiers were waiting for the time of prayer. At half past ten at night, a signal rocket was launched, and everyone gathered in the church porch. The latter consisted of a very large oval tent, the open side of which was only connected by a canvas awning without sides, so only a part of the higher ranks and officers were placed in the tent, and therefore they were somewhat protected from the wind, while the rest stood in a dense crowd under the open sky. In the wild, barren steppe, especially in the joyless, with its deathly silence, unpleasant, far from things dear to the heart, and religious singing made a special impression on them..."[2].

When fortresses and cities were occupied by troops, when the need arose to build the first garrison churches, the burden of building and arranging them fell on the shoulders of the clergy. At that time, it was quite common for the military themselves to raise funds for the construction

of the first churches. The engineers and architects of the first temples in the region were either priests or officers, and their builders were soldiers. In addition, the first Russian schools of the Syrdarya line, opened in the 1860s, were also headed by the priests of the garrison churches. The construction of the first Orthodox churches in Turkestan began in 1847 with the construction of the Raim military fortress near the confluence of the Syrdarya into the Aral Sea by order of the Orenburg Governor-General V.A. Obruchev. After the construction of the Raim fortress was completed, a portable church named after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was sent there. The first settlement of military Cossacks in the Syrdarya was associated with the project to form the Syrdarya line and began in 1849, when 25 Cossack families were settled near the Raim fortress, located 60 kilometers from the Syrdarya. In 1852, this fortress was moved to the upper reaches of the Syrdarya and was named the 1st fortress - Kazalu (Kazalinsk). By the way, in 1858, on the initiative of the Orenburg bishop Anthony of Radonezh, under his command, the first school for children was opened in the fortress by priest A.G. Pobedonostsev[3].

At the end of 1858, the church was moved to a special mud brick building designed by Major General Burno. But it collapsed in 1862, and a new church building had to be built. It was built of the same mud brick and stood until 1874. Finally, in 1874, a new church was built of baked brick and consecrated in the name of the Mother of God on December 15, under the leadership of the priest Yevgeny Andreyevich Yevgrotov. The new church was a rectangular, straight building with an almost flat iron roof, in the middle of which there was an octagonal lantern-shaped dome. On its western side was a bell tower under a canopy supported by brick pillars. The interior of this church was simple, the iconostasis and icons on its walls were somewhat old and in poor condition. The church was built mainly with public funds and partly with donations from private individuals, the most famous of whom was the merchant N. I. Ivanov[4]. Priest Kapiton Vysotsky, describing the condition of the Kazalinsk church, recalls: "I saw this church in 1865, passing by. Like the entire fortress, the church was built on a low ground. During the flood of the Syrdarya, the water rose and affected the soil.... As a result, less than 10 years after its construction, the church was so dilapidated that, due to the absence of a local priest, at the request of the Orthodox population, I held services in it, fearing for my own life and the lives of the pilgrims. Built of brick, without any connections, in a weak place, made of fasces and filled with clay on top, and covered with tea inside, it could not stand under the weight of the roof and sank..."[5]. From July 5, 1854, at the request of V.A. Perovsky, the command of the troops, local residents and fortifications along the Syrdarya line, as well as his flotilla The commander of the Syrdarya line, subordinate to the Orenburg governor, was assigned to Major General Baron Fitingof with the rank of commander. Later, a border line consisting of military fortifications was built to guard the southern borders of the Russian Empire from the Central Asian side. Until 1864, the Syrdarya line consisted of 4 fortresses: Kazalinsk, Karmakchi, Perovsky and Zhulek fortresses. Interestingly, there were 2 full-time priests for all these fortifications. The church building in Karmakchi was the tallest building, but by 1866 it had neither an iconostasis, nor an altar, nor a priest.

In 1853, Fort Perovsky was built on the site of the Akmachit fortress, and in 1855, at the request of its first priest, Lev Gorokovsky, a portable cloth church was brought here from Orenburg. Soon after the Russians captured the fortress, at the request of Count Perovsky, a charitable campaign was launched throughout the empire to build a church of the Mother of God in this fortress. Dukes Nikolai Alexandrovich and Alexander Alexandrovich donated large and small Bibles and a number of liturgical books to this church. Other Russian Orthodox followed the example of royal donors, and soon a large amount of money was collected - 86 thousand rubles. The first church, hastily built, was consecrated on September 13 of the same year. Due to dampness and rain, it soon rotted, and in 1861 another temporary one was built in its place, made of brick, with thin walls and covered with felt. "The thin walls of rough brick were covered with felt, and pieces of tent cloth were thrown over the felt. The strong winds and heavy rains that often blow in the fall have already completed the destruction of this roof. In winter, when the temperature drops to -25 degrees, the wind blows from the north, and despite the presence of two

iron stoves, the cold penetrates into the church"[6]. From 1856 to 1865, priest Andrei Malov served in this church. He tried several times to build a new church building. But they turned out to be ineffective, and the priest in vain made many drawings, plans and estimates for the construction of a new church building. In 1865, priest Kapiton Vysotsky was appointed to replace Andrei Malov. However, despite the fact that Adjutant General Kryzhanovsky, after studying the Orenburg Governor-General's Turkestan region, promised that the construction of the temple would begin next spring, the problem was not resolved even during his time. In March 1866, General Romanovsky, who had gone to Tashkent to take up the post of military governor, encouraged the priest Kapiton Vysotsky, promising that the construction of churches would be the first priority, not only in Fort Perovsky, but also in all the fortifications of the territory entrusted to him. However, the Bukhara campaign against the fortresses of Ura-Tyube and Jizzakh soon put a temporary stop to all work. Upon returning from the meeting, the local chief priest informed Kapiton that the construction of the church had been postponed by order of General Kryzhanovsky himself, and that all the building materials prepared for the church would be sent to Tashkent on the first steamer to build the governor-general's house, since he had chosen Tashkent as his summer residence. Seeing that the work on the construction of the church had again stalled, Kapiton accepted an offer to serve in the newly captured fortress in Ura-Tyube. "There I will build a chapel, and I will carry out this project in other places as well. On February 2, 1867, I left for my new place of service. I handed over the Fort Perovsky church to my heir in the same condition as I received it, with the exception of a few sacred objects and vessels that were scarce..."[7]. Above Fort Perovsky, the small fort of Julek was founded in 1861. A small house of worship was built there with voluntary donations and was managed by the Fort Perovsky church. This house, beautiful both outside and inside, was sufficient to serve the garrison population, despite its small size.

During the 1860s, the military campaigns of the Russian troops to conquer Central Asia expanded and intensified. In 1864, the following Kokand cities were captured - Turkestan, Shymkent and Avliyoata (Zhambul), as well as the Merke and Tokmok fortresses. During this military campaign, a priest and a mobile church named after the Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky were in service in the detachment of Colonel Chernyaev. In 1866, full-time priests were appointed to the first three cities occupied and churches adapted for religious services were built in them. They used simple buildings made of local baked bricks. A priest was appointed to the Tokmok settlement only in 1868. In 1866, T.G. Pobedonostsev (brother of priest A.G. Pobedonostsev) became the priest of the church located in the present city of Turkestan. The first church there was built in 1871 in the name of St. Nicholas from baked bricks, in the form of a simple small house, and its cost did not exceed 2,000 rubles. From 1884 to January 1886, a new church was built from baked bricks under the leadership of priest Alexander Tikhomirov. 22 thousand rubles were allocated for its construction, and the capacity of the new church was increased to 100 people. In the city of Avliyoata, services were held from 1866 to 1870 in a field church located in a military barracks. In 1870, with the voluntary donations of garrison officials and the efforts of soldiers, priest Andrei Belozersky built a special building from ordinary bricks. This church was also consecrated in the name of St. Nicholas. But by 1890 it had fallen into disrepair. In 1890, a new church building was erected on a stone foundation made of baked bricks, with a bell tower in place of the previous one. On November 30, 1892, it was rebuilt in the name of St. Nicholas with the help of treasury funds. Its bell tower contained 8 bells with a total weight of 196 pounds.

In 1865, Chinaz and Tashkent were captured one after another, and priest Andrei Malov directly participated in the capture of Tashkent. Even before the capture of Tashkent, General Chernyaev had already demanded a portable church from the Verny fortress. The difficult financial situation did not allow him to even think about the rapid construction of the capital's church. Only General Chernyaev gave A. Malov the necessary amount of money to bring the necessary things from Moscow - sacred vessels and liturgical books. From 1866 to 1868, services were held in the mobile church of the Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky in Tashkent. Several attempts to build a

permanent building for the church were unsuccessful. At that time, there were only two priests in all of Tashkent: Andrey Malov and Gavril Shiryaev. Just three years after the capture of the city, at the suggestion of Adjutant General von Kaufman, a military church made of raw brick was laid in August and consecrated in the last days of December 1868 - on the 22nd. It was named in honor of Saints George and Joseph, and its first rector was the famous priest A. Malov. The iconostasis in it was taken from the mobile church, only painted in a different color. The total cost of this building reached 7,000 rubles. A priest was also appointed to Chinoz at that time, and services were held in the tent church from 1868 to 1871. In a short time they prepared building materials for the temple, but there was no money to build it. In December 1872, priest A.N. Nadezhdin from the Tomsk diocese was appointed to Chinoz. During his time, the community bought a small private house and turned it into a church.

On September 15, 1866, General Romanovsky captured Khujand. On September 13 of the same year, General Kryzhanovsky laid the foundation of the first temple in Khujand. Orthodox newspapers and magazines in Russia wrote: "General Romanovsky, having subdued Khojand, built a church on the left bank of the Syrdarya..." [8]. The building of the Khujand church, which was exaggerated in the press, presented a sad picture - it was in the form of a primitive barracks with a cross on top, and priest Kapiton Vysotsky, who saw it with his own eyes, described the church as follows: "Paying attention to this and similar reports published in various newspapers, on March 5, 1867, approaching Khojand, I expected to see this church founded by General Kryzhanovsky. But arriving at night and after a long wait for instructions on where to go, I began to look around the fortress in search of the church, but could not find it. Only in the morning did I go to see the church. I approached the fortress and saw a barracks with a cross and a guard on top. This church ..." [9]. The Khujand temple remained in this condition until the fall of 1867, when a temporary church with a flat roof made of baked bricks was built on the same foundation with a small amount of funds collected through donations, and an iconostasis was assembled from icons belonging to the battalion stationed in the city of Khujand. This temple was consecrated in December 1867. By 1900, Khujand had a beautiful, strictly Russian-style stone church surrounded by a strong fence in a grove of trees[10].

The Jizzakh fortress was captured by the Russians in October 1866, and a church was built there, which they decided to name in the name of St. Nicholas. On March 7, 1867, the Ura-Tyube fortress, located on a huge rock, was captured by Russian troops. The regimental chaplain, Kapiton Vysotsky, settled in this fortress with his family and immediately began looking for a place to hold religious ceremonies. "The commandant began to allocate buildings for his battalion, and I began to look for funds somewhere to build at least a temporary church. Our choice fell on the huge gate of the fortress, built of baked bricks, in the Arabic style, with a dome. At that time there was a guardhouse here..., in the meantime, I asked permission from the spiritual authorities to build a church, and in October, having subscribed to the garrison, I collected a little money and began to turn the gates into a church. Around this time, new district administrators began to arrive, and the first of them was the military governor of the Syrdarya region, Major General N.N. Golovachev. He, in turn, helped us on his own behalf. Having received new help, I soon organized a church. On the evening of November 20, Governor-General K.P. von Kaufman arrived at the Ura-Tyube fortress with General Golovachev. The Governor-General, having learned with pleasure that the church had been built here and was ready for consecration, expressed his desire to participate in its consecration. and the next day the Church of St. Nicholas in Ura-Tyube was consecrated"[11]. This church, converted from the former Kokand Gate, was small, but extremely comfortable, and its interior was elegantly decorated in a completely oriental style. In July 1868, Alexei Zelenetsky was appointed priest of this church instead of Kapiton and served until February 1872. Due to lack of funds, in the first years this church did not have an iconostasis, instead of which several icons were installed. On June 11, 1867, the Syrdarya region was formed from the above-mentioned annexed lands. A special committee, which discussed the project for the administration of the Turkestan region in

St. Petersburg, decided to establish a special Turkestan Governorate-General, independent of Orenburg, and confirmed it by the Supreme Decree of July 11, 1867.

In May-June 1868, Russian troops captured the cities of Samarkand, Kattakurgan, and Urgut in the eastern part of the Bukhara Khanate, thus ending the advance of Russian troops to the south. The Zarafshan district was formed here, and the first Orthodox churches began to be built on its territory in 1868. Four months after the occupation by the imperial troops, in August 1868, priest Kapiton Vysotsky from Ura-Tyube was appointed to Samarkand. Since the construction of a church in the fortress to meet the Christian needs of a detachment of four thousand people was urgently required by the imperial authorities. By this time, Kapiton Vysotsky had sufficient experience in organizing and building churches and immediately began work upon arrival. The flat roof of the church is covered with a beautiful cornice and carved alabaster (ganch) pediments, the two-story bell tower is also decorated with pediments. The iconostasis is also carved from pure alabaster. The church is missing only icons, which were temporarily replaced by icons belonging to the Samarkand garrison units. This church also stood out against the background of the surrounding buildings with its white color. The Samarkand church was considered the best in the region at that time. This building functioned until 1882, when another church was built in its place in the center of the new city. Letters written by the regimental chaplain Kapiton Vysotsky in December 1869 cover the events of those days; "At the request of the Governor-General and the head of the Zarafshan district, I was assigned to Samarkand... I arrived here on September 10. To meet the Christian needs of a detachment of four thousand people, it was urgently necessary to build some kind of temple, and they showed me one of the mosques standing in the center of the fortress. But it was very small (11 arshins long and 10 arshins wide) and required expansion. I decided to use it." [12]. A week later, with the permission of the head of the Zarafshan district, Major General A.K. Abramov, who took an active part in the construction of the temple, the foundation of the temple was laid, and on November 22, its consecration ceremony was held. By the end of 1869, work on the church with a bell tower was completed. In February 1871, the Orenburg merchant of the 1st guild, Andrei Petrovich Vesnin, made a large donation to the St. George Church in Samarkand: a large Bible, a cross, and sacred service items (a total of 600 rubles for the church). In June 1872, the first bishop of Tashkent and Turkestan, Sofony (Sokolsky), visited Samarkand and, accompanied by Archpriest Andrey Malov, consecrated this church. In addition to icons, the chapel also contained regimental flags of the Samarkand garrison [13].

In the border town of Kattakurgan, "upon arrival, the priest (V. Nevostruev) began to look for premises for a temporary church and funds for its construction. General A.K. Abramov listened to the priest, gave permission, and in addition offered to make a donation of his own, and to appeal to the gentlemen of the Samarkand garrison. As soon as the priest made his request, they all expressed their full sympathy, and each did what he could. This led to the collection of a total of 250 rubles. Having secured such an investment and the participation of General Abramov, the priest returned to Kattakurgan... - a week later the work was completed" [14]. On December 10, 1868, the ceremony of consecrating the church in the name of St. Prince Vladimir took place, with the participation of General Abramov, the head of the Zarafshan district. Four years later, in June 1872, the dean of the Syrdarya churches, Andrei Malov, consecrated the newly built building of the St. Vladimir Church. As a rule, church buildings were built on the best and highest places. Of course, all these temples were primitive and inconvenient, and sometimes from their appearance one could guess that they were a temple only by the cross on top of the building and the guard at the entrance. "Having small and temporary churches, they were built sometimes in the khan's palace, sometimes at the fortress gates. According to the church deans; They are taking all measures for the proper organization of churches, they are appealing to the people's military command with a request to build new churches or to bring existing ones into a more suitable form and make them stronger and safer." The clergy who came to Turkestan with the imperial troops, as well as field churches and newly founded churches, were initially subordinate to the Orenburg bishop, and the churches in Semirechye to the Tomsk bishop. Due

to the remoteness of the region, none of the above bishops could visit the Syrdarya churches. The clergy also had an uncertain position, being subordinate both to the bishop, who was a thousand miles away, and to the military commanders in the region, and more dependent on the latter. The church administration was too remote from the center of the empire remoteness, various inconveniences and difficulties on the roads have long demanded the creation of a separate independent diocese. In 1868, the Governor-General of Turkestan Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman appealed to the Holy Synod with a request to establish a special diocese in the Turkestan region. In St. Petersburg, on the basis of the Supremely approved conclusion of the State Council of May 4, 1871 and the decree of the Holy Synod No. 36 of June 17 of the same year, the Turkestan diocese was established. Its first bishop, Sophony, had the title of Turkestan and Tashkent, and his seat was in Verny, the main city of the Semirechye region. In 1872, 13 churches were transferred from Orenburg to the Turkestan diocese. The first wave of church construction in the Turkestan region was aimed at meeting the needs of the military and the Orthodox population, until over time it became possible to build new, metropolitan churches. At that time, the work of the clergy in Turkestan was extremely important and necessary. Thanks to their services in the troops, not only their spiritual and moral level was maintained, but most importantly, the moral level of soldiers and officers far from their homeland was maintained, helping them overcome various difficulties in the difficult conditions of field life.

In one of the letters of the Rev. Kapiton Vysotsky, written in December 1869, which contains valuable information about the church life of Turkestan in those years, it is written: "The main drawback of our churches is the lack of bells, sacred vessels and iconostases. The elimination of this drawback depends on the resources that the churches will have in the future, but such resources do not exist yet. The only hope left is the charity of Russian society. You have the right to demand courage from Russian soldiers, our Syrdarya people have shown themselves in this regard, but it would be unfair to demand funds from them for the construction of churches (say, for themselves), because this is beyond their power, despite their sincere desire... With the arrival of K.P. Kaufman in the region, the work on the organization of Orthodox churches has developed significantly. Since then, that is, in 2 years, 7 churches have appeared, and given the resources we have, this is very". The simple and poor-quality construction of the first Orthodox churches was explained by a number of reasons. Only local materials had to be used for the construction of buildings, since it was difficult to deliver building materials to these regions. Their cheapness and economy played an important role in the preparation of plans and drawings. All engineering and construction work was carried out not by craftsmen, but by military personnel from local garrisons who were not trained in construction and did not have construction tools at their disposal. The first wave of the construction of Orthodox churches did not last long. It served the purpose of providing people with religious services at the initial stage, which lasted about 25 years, until it became possible to build new metropolitan churches. In 1883, Bishop Neophyte was appointed to the Turkestan diocese. With this appointment, the Turkestan diocese entered a new stage in its development. Bishop Neophyte issued a decree prohibiting the construction of temporary churches. From now on, all houses of God were to be built only of baked brick or wood and with the knowledge or blessing of the ruling bishop[15].

**DISCUSSION:** The construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan served as a strategic instrument for consolidating the Russian Empire's political and cultural dominance in Central Asia during the 19th century. Beyond fulfilling the spiritual needs of Russian settlers, military personnel, and the local Orthodox community, these religious structures became symbols of imperial presence and cultural assimilation. The church-building efforts were deeply intertwined with the broader military, administrative, and missionary policies of the empire, reflecting a coordinated approach to governance and ideological influence. Architecturally, many of these churches blended Russian ecclesiastical design with regional elements, subtly influencing local building traditions and urban aesthetics. This architectural fusion not only represented imperial ambitions but also signaled attempts at cultural adaptation and negotiation. Furthermore, Orthodox churches functioned as multifaceted institutions—religious centers, military chapels,

administrative outposts, and venues for public gathering. They were often positioned in central locations, reinforcing the spatial dominance of imperial power in colonial urban planning. Socially and politically, these churches contributed to the shaping of a new civic identity, facilitating interaction between Russian authorities and segments of the local population. They played a role in education, charity, and cultural activities, thereby fostering early forms of a multiethnic, albeit hierarchically structured, society. However, the local population's response to church construction was far from monolithic. While some elites cooperated or remained indifferent, others viewed these structures as symbols of foreign intrusion and religious imposition. This diversity of responses underscores the complex interplay between imperial ambition, religious policy, and local agency in the colonial context.

## CONCLUSION:

This study highlights the significant role of the Russian Empire's colonial policy in reshaping the socio-political and cultural fabric of 19th-century Turkestan, particularly through the construction of Orthodox churches. These religious structures functioned not merely as places of worship but as deliberate instruments of imperial power, designed to assert Russian dominance, promote cultural assimilation, and transform the urban and symbolic landscape of the region. The findings underscore how architecture was strategically used to reinforce administrative control and alter the identity of a predominantly Muslim population. The implications of this research point to the importance of understanding colonial architecture as a tool of ideological influence and cultural transformation. Further research could expand this inquiry by exploring local responses to church construction, the role of indigenous elites in mediating these changes, and comparative analysis with other regions of the Russian Empire or colonial territories where similar strategies were employed.

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