

# THE SOVIET IMPACT ON CENTRAL ASIA

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Painting of a rally on the square in front of the Kunya Ark palace in Khiva celebrating the announcement of the dethronement of Sayyid Abdullah Khan and the Bolshevik takeover on February 2, 1920. (Located in the museum in the Mohammad Rakhim Khan Madrasa, Khiva, Uzbekistan.)

## For Teachers

The materials below were collected during my participation in a study tour of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in June 2022 that was conducted by the University of Arizona's Center for Middle Eastern Studies thanks to a Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

While traveling along the Silk Roads, what stuck out to me the most was how much the Bolshevik takeover of Central Asia in the 1920s and its incorporation into the Soviet Union significantly affected the centuries-old way of life of the region's peoples. No matter where we traveled, this seemed to me to be the dominant thread that wove its way through the region's diverse peoples and places.

In the following activity, students analyze groups of various items – from photographs to objects – to examine the ways that the Soviets affected various aspects of life in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

- Each set of items is included in a group that deals with some general aspect of life. Not *every* aspect of life under the Soviets, however, is included (for example, the lack of political freedoms).
  - **Group 1: the economy** – items relate to the Soviets establishing a command economy and promoting industry and the production of cotton
  - **Group 2: technology** – items relate to the Soviets introducing modern technology
  - **Group 3: infrastructure** – items relate to the Soviets building modern infrastructure
  - **Group 4: religion** – items relate to the Soviets suppressing religion
  - **Group 5: education** – items relate to the Soviets suppressing madrasas and introducing a modern education system that was open to women
  - **Group 6: women** – items relate to how women gained some freedoms under the Soviets, but motherhood was still emphasized especially after WWII
  - **Group 7: identity** – items relate to how Central Asians were incorporated into the Soviet Union and given a Soviet identity especially after WWII
- This activity can take place within an average class period and can be adapted by teachers for their particular wants or needs. Teachers can set up the groups of items as a gallery walk or other activity for student groups. Teachers can assign groups of students to different groups of items and after analyzing the items students can share their analysis with the entire class. Teachers can also assign all of the groups of items to groups of students.
- As students analyze the groups of items, they should ask themselves, “What aspect of life in Central Asia do these items generally deal with and how did the Soviets impact or change this aspect of life?” Students can also assess whether the changes brought about by the Soviets were positive or negative.
- Included are a timeline of major developments and maps to help provide historical and geographical context for students as they analyze the items.
- This activity is designed for high school students (9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade). Teachers can use this activity in a variety of courses to teach in particular imperialism and life in the Soviet Union. Students should have a basic knowledge of communism and the history of the Soviet Union to analyze these items.
- All of the images used are photographs I took on the ground in Central Asia.

## Historical Background and Timeline

By 1800, the deserts, river valleys, and mountains of Central Asia had been inhabited for thousands of years by a variety of nomadic and sedentary peoples. They mostly spoke Turkic languages, such as the Uzbeks, but some spoke a Persian language, such as the Tajiks. These peoples had become Muslim about a thousand years before and minarets, mosques, and madrasas (Muslim schools) dotted the cityscapes. Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva for centuries were major cities of the Silk Road, the trade routes between Europe and Asia. Their location made them wealthy, but by the 1600s they had declined in power due to Europeans building global empires and sailing directly to Asia, avoiding the Silk Road “middlemen.”

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the Age of Imperialism, the Russian Empire of the tsars had gradually conquered Central Asia, conquering and ruling over some cities directly, such as Tashkent in 1865 and Samarkand in 1868, while creating protectorates in Khiva and Bukhara, where the local rulers – the khans of Khiva and the emirs of Bukhara – retained only a little degree of independence.

**1917** – The Russian Revolution occurred during World War I, resulting in the end of centuries of tsarist rule in Russia and Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks (Communists) seizing power by the end of the year.

**1918 – 1922** – The Russian Civil War was fought between the Red Army of the Bolsheviks and the White Army, which was composed of different groups who opposed the Bolsheviks. The war ended in a victory for the Bolsheviks and millions of casualties.

**1920** – The Red Army conquered the city of Bukhara. The Bolsheviks ended the Emirate of Bukhara and replaced it with a Bukharan People’s Soviet Republic. The last emir of Bukhara fled to Afghanistan. The last khan of Khiva was also overthrown and exiled to Ukraine while the Bolsheviks replaced the Khanate of Khiva with a Khorezm People’s Soviet Republic.

**1922** – The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR; the Soviet Union) was formally created.

**1924** – Soviet Central Asian states were reorganized and the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic was created. It included the cities of Bukhara and Khiva.

**1928** – Collectivization of agriculture began in the Soviet Union. Under collectivization, private ownership of land was forbidden and agricultural production was reorganized through state-controlled farms.

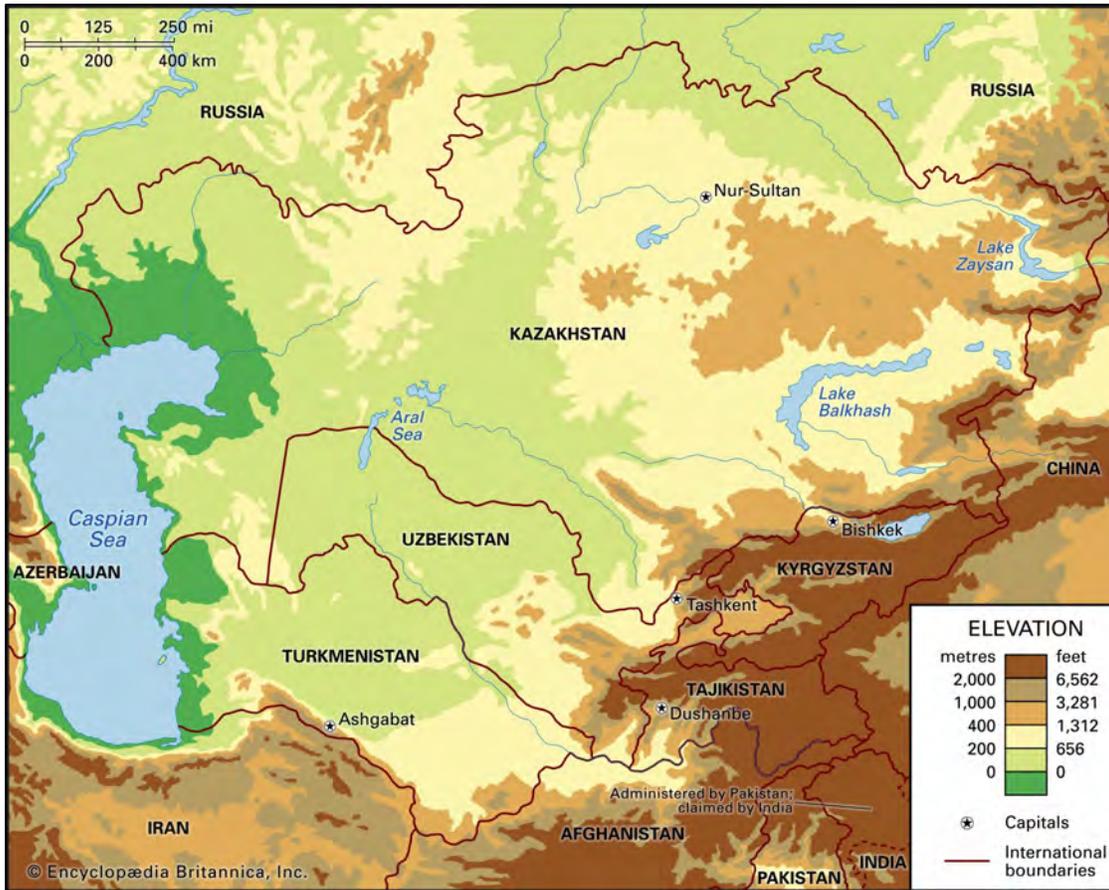
**1929** – The Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic was created from the eastern territory of the Uzbek SSR.

**1941 – 1945** – The Second World War began when the Soviet Union was invaded by Nazi Germany and ended with Germany’s defeat. About 24 million Soviet citizens died in the war.

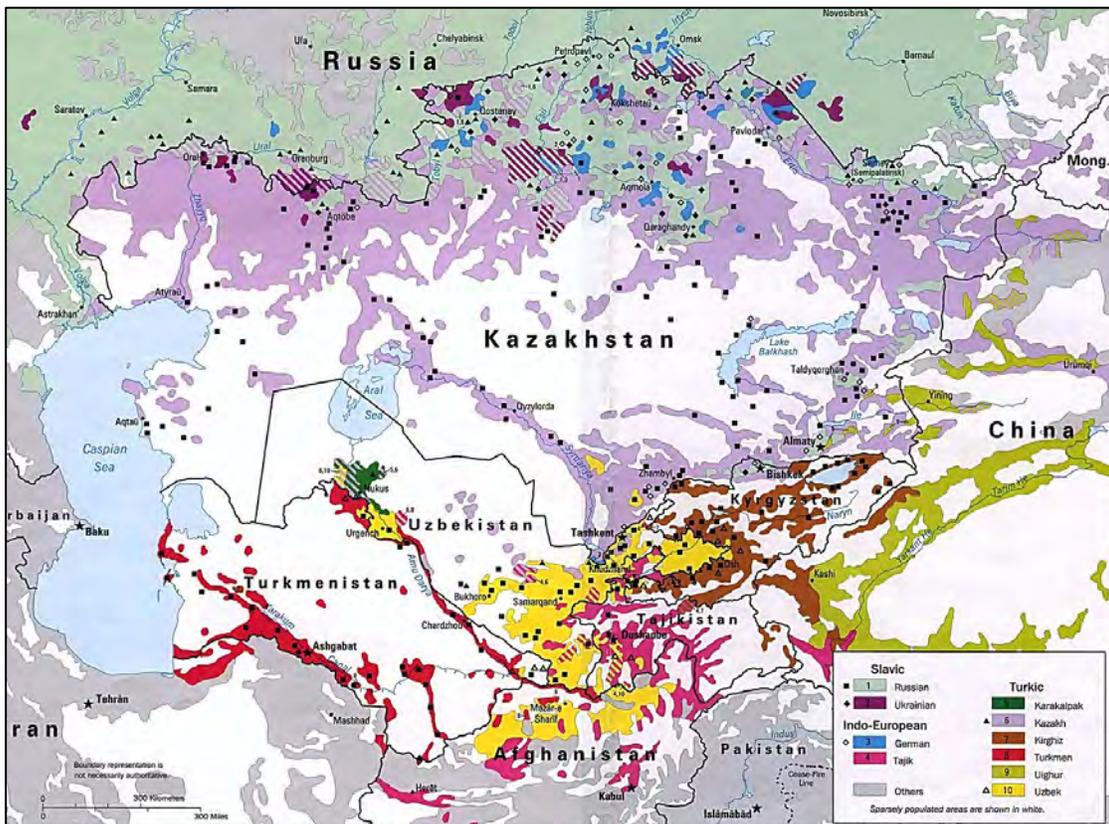
**1991** – The Cold War ended with the collapse and dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Central Asian republics, such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, gained their independence.

# Maps

## Map 1: The Geography of Central Asia



## Map 2: The Peoples of Central Asia



Map 3: Central Asia in the Russian Empire by 1917



Map 4: Soviet Central Asia in 1922



Map 5: The Soviet Union, 1924 – 1991



Map 6: Central Asia Today



# Group 1



In the small town of Gijduvon near Bukhara is the Narzullaev ceramics workshop. For eight generations the Narzullaev family has produced their unique ceramics, which the current owner's grandfather, Ibodullo (*photograph at the top right*) kept alive during the Soviet era, when the government took over ceramics production and shut down many traditional workshops.

# Group 1



The Navoi Theater, the national opera theater, was built in the 1940s in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. The fountain in front of it is in the shape of a cotton boll.



Popular throughout Uzbekistan today is a porcelain with a cotton pattern – shown here on a tea cup and a napkin holder – that was first developed and produced by the state-owned Tashkent Porcelain Factory in 1953.



The “Cotton Harvester” subway stop in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Built in 1977.

Small lapel pin with a cotton boll and “Uzbekistan” written in Cyrillic letters.



# Group 1



Soviet mosaic in the Fann Mountains of western Tajikistan.



# Group 1



Emblem of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic ("CSS Tocikiston), used in 1936. The text says, "Proletarians of the world, unite!"  
(Located in the Rudaki Historical Museum, Panjakent, Tajikistan)

# Group 2



“Arrival of the first airplane in Dushanbe [the capital of Tajikistan]” (1929)  
(Located in the Rudaki Historical Museum, Panjakent, Tajikistan)



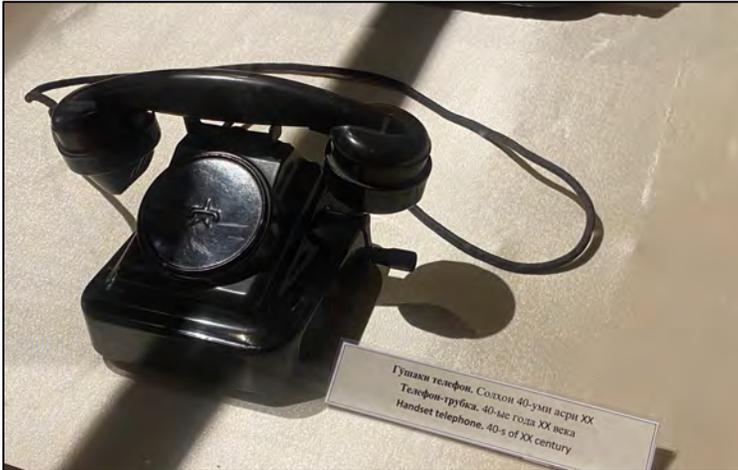
A photograph of a tractor on a collective farm, 1930s.  
(Located in the Rudaki Historical Museum, Panjakent, Tajikistan)

# Group 2



A painting titled, "The Mobile Movie Camera" (1956)  
(Located in the Rudaki Historical Museum, Panjacent, Tajikistan)

# Group 2



Telephone, 1940s  
(Located in the Rudaki  
Historical Museum,  
Panjakent, Tajikistan)



Typewriter, 1950s  
(Located in the Rudaki  
Historical Museum,  
Panjakent, Tajikistan)



Radio, 1960s  
(Located in the Rudaki  
Historical Museum,  
Panjakent, Tajikistan)

# Group 3



The remains of an overpass built by the Soviets. It was left unfinished when the USSR collapsed in 1991. Located in western Uzbekistan near Khiva.



Undated photograph of marshes being drained outside of Bukhara, Uzbekistan. Bukhara was famous for its storks, but the draining of the marshes in the area helped contribute to the decline of the stork population.  
*(Located in the Chasma-Ayub Mausoleum,*

# Group 3



Photograph of water tower in Bukhara, built in the 1920s.  
(Located in the Chasma-Ayub Mausoleum, Bukhara, Uzbekistan)



The water tower of Bukhara today has a restaurant and observation deck at the top.

# Group 3



Labi-Hauz – or “by the pool” in Persian – is the name of this area of Bukhara, Uzbekistan that surrounded an artificial pond created in the 1600s. It was one of many pools that used to exist in the city that provided drinking water to the population. The Soviets buried most of the 114 ponds and until 1958 Labi-Hauz was drained and used as a volleyball area.

# Group 4



The Juma Mosque in Khiva, Tajikistan. Supported by 230 pillars, this mosque was built in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, restored in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and was shut down in 1929 and turned into a storage warehouse for cotton.



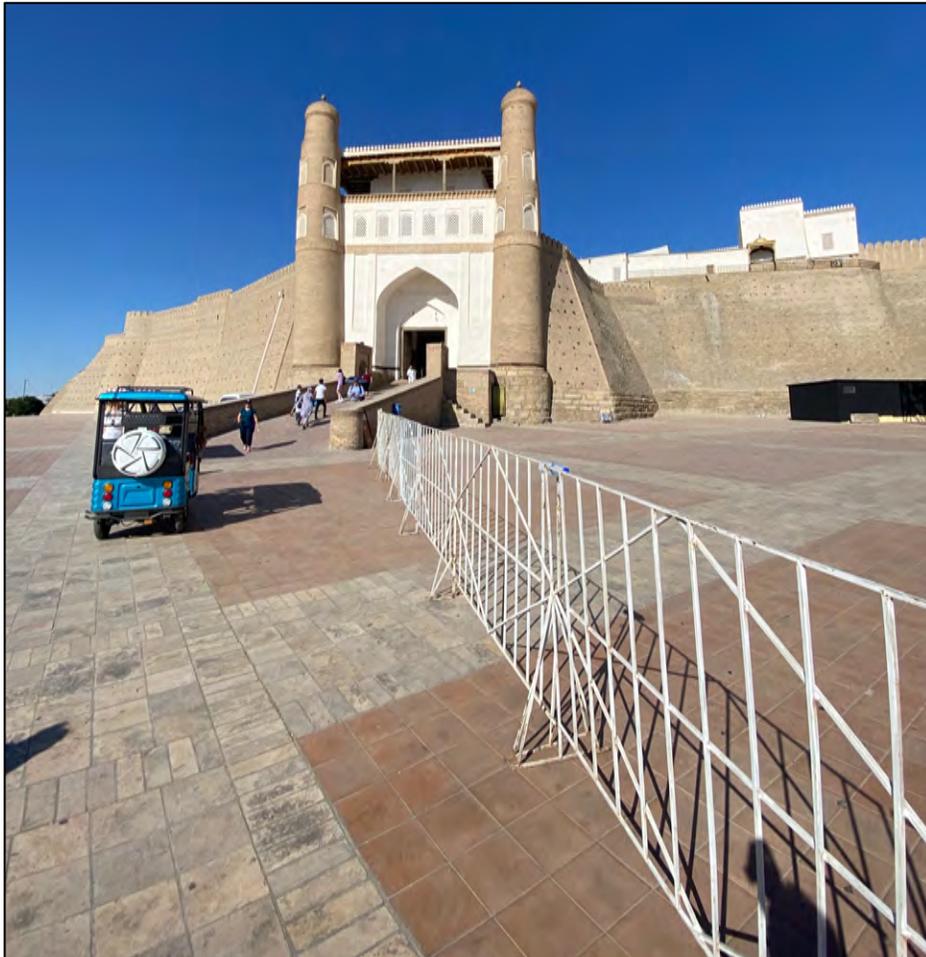
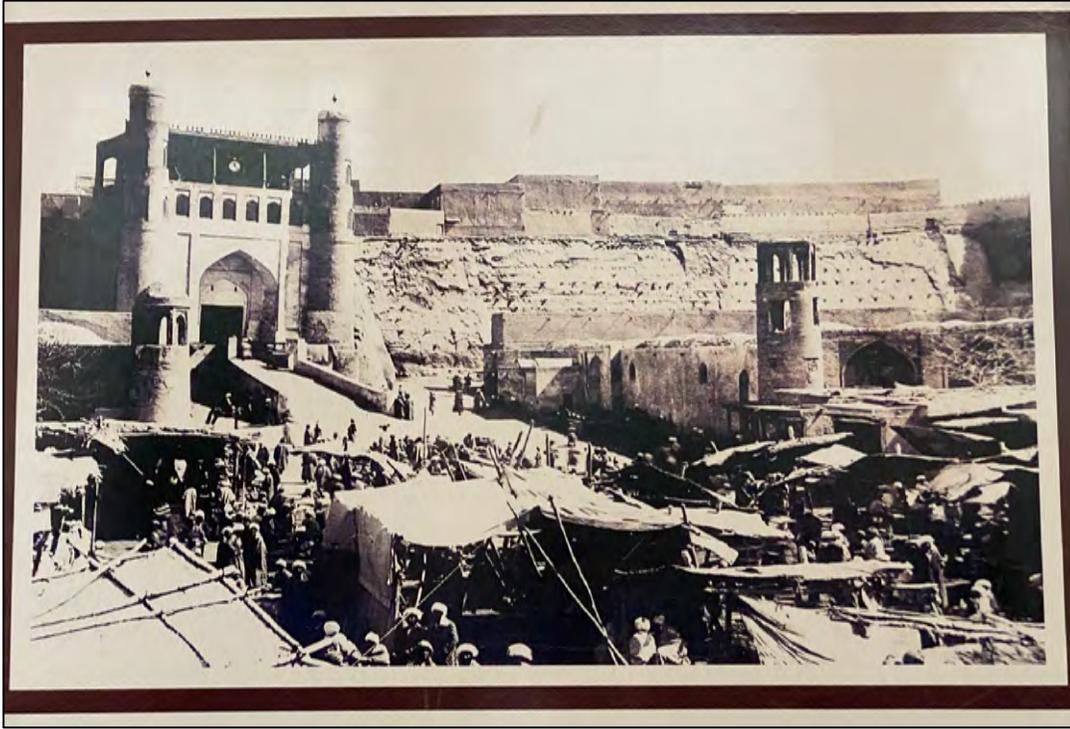
The Magok-i-Attari Mosque, the oldest mosque in Bukhara, built by the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. During the Soviet era, it was the location of a bar and then housed a carpet museum in 1958.

# Group 4



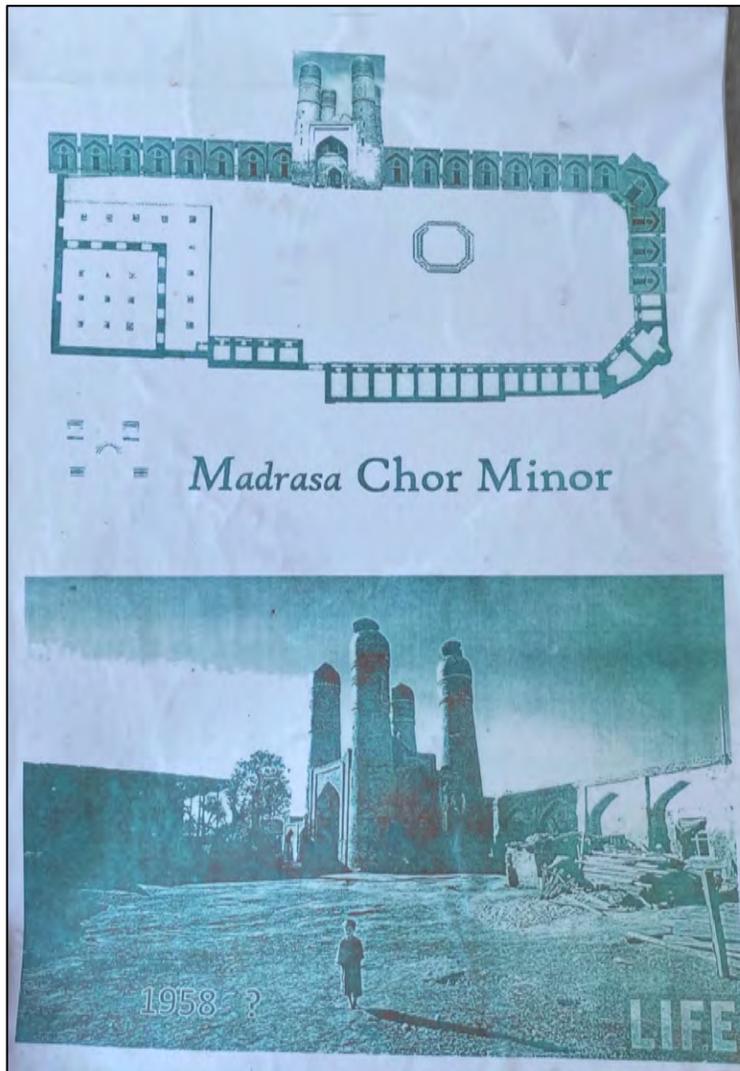
The Kalyan (Great) Minaret of Bukhara, Uzbekistan was built in 1127 and spared by Genghis Khan when he sacked the city in 1220. In 1920, as the Red Army attacked Bukhara during the Russian Civil War, the minaret was damaged (*photograph on the left*). Pilots fighting for the Bolsheviks tried to see who could knock it over.

# Group 4



The Registan (literally meaning “sandy place”) used to be the main town square of Bukhara, Uzbekistan. Located just outside the gates of the Ark Fortress, where the Emir of Bukhara lived, were a mosque and a madrasa (Muslim school) (*shown in the photograph above*) that were destroyed by the Soviets.

# Group 4



The Chor Minor (Four Minarets) of Bukhara, Uzbekistan used to serve as the entrance to a madrasa (Muslim school) that was built in 1806. The madrasa and the mosque (*shown in the images to the left*) were destroyed by the Soviets. The minarets, which were left standing, were restored in 1968.



# Group 5



The double-domed Mir-i Arab Madrasa in Bukhara, Uzbekistan was completed in 1536 and was one of the few allowed to continue to operate in the Soviet era. Although it was closed between 1926 and 1946, it was allowed to reopen that year because the Soviets figured it would be safer to keep an eye on Muslim leaders there than have them operate in secret.

Madrasas were schools for boys where they would live and learn about different subjects, but especially study Islamic texts.



# Group 5



A model of the campus, and a classroom at Bukhara State University in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, which was founded in 1930.

# Group 5



Students and faculty of Bukhara State University in the 1930s, including 10 women.

# Group 6



Painting titled,  
"Excursion in the Plant" (1959)  
(Located in the Rudaki Historical  
Museum, Panjakent, Tajikistan)



# Group 6



A Soviet-made image of women burning their burkhas, which some Muslim women had worn for centuries and were banned by the Soviets. (Located in the Historical Museum of Sughd Region, Khujand, Tajikistan.)



Soviet Motherhood Medal, 2<sup>nd</sup> class. Made of brass and created during WWII, it was awarded to mothers who had 5 children. There were other ranks and medals for women who gave birth to more children.

# Group 7



A lapel pin celebrating 60 years of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic in 1989.



A Soviet medal commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Soviet Union's defeat of Nazi Germany. A father holds a child and a sword as he stands over broken pieces of a swastika.

# Group 7



Decoration in the “Cosmonaut” subway stop in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, which was built in 1984 to commemorate the history of Soviet space exploration. This image depicts the Russian-born Yuri Gagarin who in 1961 became the first man to travel into space and orbit Earth.



The largest statue of Vladimir Lenin is located in Khujand, Tajikistan, which from 1936 to 1992 was named Leninabad (“city of Lenin”). After the collapse of the Soviet Union the statue was moved from a place of prominence to a small park.

# Group 7



World War II memorial in Khujand, Tajikistan.



# Group 7



World War II  
Memorial at the Hisor  
Fortress in Tajikistan.

